The Reunification of China

Peace through War under the Song Dynasty

PETER LORGE

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The Song dynasty (960–1279) has been characterized by its pre-eminent civil culture and military weakness. This ground-breaking work demonstrates that the civil dominance of the eleventh century was the product of a half century of continuous warfare and ruthless political infighting. The spectacular culture of the eleventh century, one of the high points in Chinese history, was built on the bloody foundation of the conquests of the tenth century. Peter Lorge examines how, rather than a planned and inevitable reunification of the Chinese empire, the foundation of the Song was an uncertain undertaking, dependent upon highly contingent battles, both military and political, whose outcome was always in doubt. Song civil culture grew out of the successful military campaigns that created the dynasty and, as the need for war and armies diminished, the need for civil officials grew. The Song dynasty's successful waging of war led ultimately to peace.

Peter Lorge is Assistant Professor of Asian Studies in the Department of History at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795* (2005), *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He is also the editor of *The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* (2012), *Debating War in Chinese History* (2013), and the book series *Asian States and Empires*.

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1
Introduction

The interaction between war and politics was the most important driving force in the formation of the early Song dynasty. War and politics shaped not just the territorial extent of the empire and the structure of the government, but the character and culture of the dynasty as well. Virtually inseparable sources of power for the first emperor, posthumously known as Song Taizu (r. 960–976), these two forces were gradually separated during the reign of the second emperor, posthumously known as Song Taizong (r. 976–997), before becoming almost fully detached from each other, at least with respect to the emperor's power, in the reign of the third emperor, posthumously known as Song Zhenzong (r. 997–1022). Up until now, this process has been simplified into a process of the rise of civil power over military power. There were, however, specific, historical reasons for the shift of political power to government bureaucrats; it did not happen because of a prescriptive imperial plan that intended to emphasize civil values over military values. Ironically, the civil-dominated government that emerged at the beginning of the eleventh century was produced by a half century of war and personal politics.

Civil officials in the late tenth century were given power in the government bureaucracy because they had no power outside of the central government. Initially, the imperial government at Kaifeng itself had very little authority. Military and political power was vested in the person of the emperor, whose authority came from his military success and his personal connections to the generals controlling the central armies. These personal ties allowed Song Taizu to focus the dynasty's military power on conquest, rather than infighting, and

then, with each military success, on political consolidation. The dynasty gradually became separated from the person of the emperor alone and, because the wars of conquest were successful, the imperial government gained power. Bureaucrats gained power when the central government they served gained power. Simultaneously, military matters, while still maintaining an enormous bureaucratic apparatus in the central government, became border or external concerns. Military men served the court, were paid by the court, and led imperial armies rather than maintaining their own forces from regional strongholds. All of these developments were driven by military success and shaped by political struggles. There was nothing natural or inevitable about the particular direction of early Song dynasty history.

The late tenth-century Song government was not yet the eleventh-century government dominated by civil officials holding the highest civil service exam degrees. Military men and civil officials without advanced degrees held positions of great authority. The culture of the Song dynasty in the tenth century laid the foundation for the flourishing civil culture of the eleventh century, but it was by no means the same as that civil-dominated, politically driven culture. Eleventh-century assumptions about the “proper” or “correct” order of things, and the sense that literati domination of the government was the natural direction for the early Song government to go, strongly influenced the writing of the history of the early Song. In the tenth century, however, the course of dynastic progress was guided by actions and reactions to military and political events, with no clear destination.

Ever since the eleventh century, the founding of the Song dynasty has been portrayed as a process of demilitarization, of the subordination of the military to civil control, and the end of a long period during which violence dominated Chinese politics. But the founding emperors did not dispense with war; they successfully used it to resolve a variety of political and territorial issues in their own

favor. The effects of individual battles within and upon the political forum were as important in the creation of the Song regime as their immediate consequences in acquiring territory. War, and even more fundamentally, battle's role in the formation of the Song empire must therefore be discussed in terms of both politics and territorial acquisition. Indeed, the political and military fortunes of Song Taizu, were one and the same. His military victories were political accomplishments, and his imperial dignity was strongly rooted in the successful campaigns of conquest that built the empire.

This relationship between war and politics did not immediately change with the succession of Taizu's brother, Taizong, to the throne. While Taizong quickly inserted men more personally loyal to himself into the government, he continued to assume that his position as emperor would be bolstered by military success. To some extent, he was correct. His brother's legacy of conquest was incomplete, and Taizong still needed to prove himself to the military elite that had formed as a result of Taizu's policy of imperial intermarriage with high-ranking generals. The problem for Taizong was that he proved to be an inept military commander. His moment of military glory in conquering the Northern Han was immediately followed by abject defeat and personal humiliation when he attempted to capture the Sixteen Prefectures. His subsequent military record was equally poor, and it became necessary for him to try to break, or at least attenuate, the link between politics and war. His own family's military ties, as well as the importance of the army due to the war Taizong had started with the Liao empire, prevented him from completely disenfranchising the military. He may well have suspected that any overt move on his part to do so would have resulted in his being deposed. What he could do was to gradually shift the focus of government toward powerless civil functionaries.

Taizong's son and successor, Zhenzong, came to the throne with the imperial bureaucratic system still incomplete and with a major war to resolve. His own succession was less fraught with controversy,

and he seems to have felt less threatened by the military elites than his father did. But while he could afford to devote less attention to placating the military, his father's training, coupled with the dominance of the newly risen civil functionaries at court, forced him into a sustained written campaign to persuade his officials to do his will. That he did not simply compel them to do so by the force at his disposal was a tribute to his personality and training. He was also in no way threatened by them, which may have contributed to his, and subsequent Song emperors, indulgent treatment of officialdom. Zhenzong's civilized behavior, coupled with the resolution of hostilities with the Liao, ended the political effect of military actions on the power of the emperor until the twelfth century.

Underlying all of these military and political successes were the intimate social connections among the elites, mostly military at the beginning of the dynasty, and the imperial family. Taizu's personal ties and leadership were particularly important in launching the dynasty on its path. It was personal ties and the loyalty that maintained them that initially held the Song polity together. The Song founding was not successful because Taizu manipulated the bureaucratic system to diminish the military and political power of the various generals he had inherited from the preceding dynasty. He convinced the generals to relinquish power and let him be emperor through his personal relationship with them. Taizu accomplished this by promises (which he kept) of enhancing their relationships through marriage ties with the imperial family rather than by force. Thus, the creation of the Song dynasty is an intensely personal story, involving a relatively small number of men near the pinnacle of power who negotiated and backed the rule of one of them.

The demilitarized, depoliticized, and depersonalized interpretation of the Song founding has informed all previous explanations of the physical and political formation of the empire. I will briefly discuss that interpretation in the rest of this introduction. In Chapter 2, I will turn to the methodology of this work, before

providing a detailed account of the creation of the Song empire that more fully integrates the role of war and politics. That account will begin with an overview of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, followed by a chronological narrative of military and political events from the reign of Zhou Shizong, through Song Taizu and Song Taizong, and ending in Zhenzong's reign shortly after the conclusion of the Chanyuan Covenant.

The demilitarization of the Song founding

> Yang Xiong said: "If Yin does not reach the utmost then Yang will not be produced. If chaos does not reach the utmost then virtue will not take shape." The chaos of the Tang house [618–907] reached the utmost in the Five Dynasties [907–960] and then Heaven's blessing was the Song. The emperor Taizu accorded with the hearts of men, *troops did not bloody swords, markets were not changed into execution grounds*, but the empire was settled. [my italics][1]

Written in the eleventh century, Fan Zuyu's explicit demilitarization of the Song founding seems extreme, but it was consistent with the view of many other Song officials and historians at that time.[2] Scarcely a hundred years after the Song founding, the campaigns that created the empire were simply ignored in favor of a bloodless and inevitable founding (a historiographical issue discussed in Chapter 2). But even this supernatural founding was marred by the inability of the Song to reconstitute completely the territory of the Tang, an inability that was eventually explained by the "south-first" strategy ostensibly adopted by Taizu.

Song Taizu's successful *coup d'etat* on 3 February 960 elevated him the short distance from supreme military commander of the Later Zhou dynasty to emperor of the Song.[3] But, while it was easy enough to officially found the Song dynasty the following day, it took him sixteen years of military campaigns to create the Song empire and make himself emperor in fact as well as in name. Since Taizu and his successors were politically and militarily successful, Song statesmen and historians saw the creation of the dynasty as inevitable. This teleological viewpoint was not accidental; it was part of the process of placing the Song dynasty in the legitimate succession (*zhengtong*) of Chinese dynasties.[4] States that had never been part of the Song empire but had been within the territory of the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and Tang empires were described as "returning" to its rule, rhetorically establishing the Song as the legitimate successor to those empires.

Chinese historians applied three general assumptions about the founding of legitimate dynasties to the creation of the Song. First and foremost, there was only one legitimate emperor in the world, who possessed the Mandate of Heaven as a result of his virtue, and all other rulers in the world had to accept his overlordship.[5] Second, the ability to conquer the empire and establish a dynasty derived from the Mandate of Heaven. Third and finally, the Chinese ecumene was the natural and proper center of the empire ruled by the legitimate emperor. These assumptions not only framed the historical portrayal of the creation of the empire but also prejudiced the way Song emperors and officials evaluated the course of events.

Those aspects of the Song founding that did not accord with the theoretical ideal were manipulated into conformity. As the quote from Fan Zuyu earlier makes clear, the extent to which kingdoms were forced to surrender to the Song was glossed over in favor of individual rulers bowing to the inevitability of Song success. Reversing the order of cause and effect, possession of territory at the end of the campaign demonstrated the military power that stemmed from the Mandate of Heaven.

The most unambiguous proof of possession of the Mandate would have been control of the territory of the Han and Tang empires. But the Song founding, and thus its legitimacy, was imperfect. For all its success in southern China and against the Northern Han kingdom, the Song army failed against the steppe empire of the Liao dynasty.[6] The third Song emperor, Zhenzong, was forced to accept not only Liao possession of a small piece of territory that had been part of the Tang empire, the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun, but also the existence of the Liao emperor. In so doing, he continued the recognition that had been quite natural for all Five Dynasties rulers (and, probably, Song Taizu as well). Parity with the Liao emperor was harder to sublimate than the territorial concessions of the Chanyuan Covenant (often called the Treaty of Shanyuan)[7] that concluded Song–Liao hostilities. Yet the Song had clearly conquered and reintegrated most

of the Chinese parts of the Han and Tang empires. Despite its imperfection, the Song had a fair claim to possession of the Mandate. It remained to construct an account of the Song founding reconciling the conventions of Chinese history with historical facts. The compromise satisfied neither ideal nor reality.

Each emperor's role in the military and political creation of the empire varied with his military fortunes, the legacy of his predecessor, and his own temperament, but all three emperors' actions, and those of their officials, had to be integrated into a unified explanation of how and why the Song empire took the form that it did. This became a process of explaining why a legitimate dynasty was unable to defeat the Liao and capture the Sixteen Prefectures, completing the territorial legacy of the Han and Tang. It was assumed that the entire responsibility for the outcome of the Song creation rested with the decisions of the Song emperors because neither Liao intentions nor complex and unpredictable military factors could be unselectively incorporated into the account. This assumption dramatically elevated the symbolic value of the Sixteen Prefectures as a sign of military weakness while entirely traducing and transcending their original, strictly military, significance. The Chanyuan Covenant and the failure to capture the Sixteen Prefectures became the logical results of a prescriptive Song policy decision. But which policy decision? Various proposals for military campaigns were mooted in the early years of the Song, but only the "south-first" strategy suggested by Zhao Pu in 968 adequately protected Taizu's military virtue and provided for the imperfect conclusion of the conquest. In this construction of events, Zhao Pu's suggestion became the blueprint of the entire Song conquest. The fact that this policy had been proposed even before the founding of the Song seemed to provide further support for this myth.

The south-first strategy was first introduced and ostensibly adopted as policy during the Later Zhou dynasty (951–960), the regime Zhao Kuangyin overthrew to establish the Song. In 955, the second Later Zhou emperor, posthumously known as Shizong, called

on his officials to submit plans for "pacifying the empire."[8] The plan of an official of the Ministry of Justice, Wang Pu, was reportedly judged best and excerpted in later histories to outline the proposed strategy of reunification.[9] Wang's most salient strategic point, after calling for an enlightened and benevolent government, was that the southern Chinese kingdoms should be conquered before turning north to destroy the Northern Han kingdom and take the Sixteen Prefectures from the Liao. Zhao Pu's 968 proposal was similar but simpler.[10] Yet neither emperor actually followed the south-first order of campaigns. Zhou Shizong launched a northern expedition after conquering only a part of the Southern Tang and Taizu's successful southern campaigns were interspersed with unsuccessful northern ones.

Despite glaring discrepancies between the actual sequence of Taizu's campaigns (and Zhou Shizong's) and the plan set out by Wang Pu and Zhao Pu, explaining the course of the empire's creation with the south-first strategy recommended itself to Song historians and civil officials for three reasons. First, it allowed them to overlook Taizu's few failures and transform his campaign record into a flawless manifestation of moral and military power.[11] Second, because Taizu's success was considered inevitable, choosing the correct policy from those proposed by officials became more important than how that policy was carried out by generals (of course, the failure of "correct" policies could always be blamed on poor execution). Civil officials were therefore more important than generals in creating the empire. Third, it tied the failure to capture the Sixteen Prefectures and humble the Liao to a flawed plan rather than to flawed virtue or legitimacy. Cause and effect were thus neatly established, and the importance of individual military events was set aside while the more significant, to civil officials, process of imposing civil, central government control over the empire was emphasized. This led to another teleological construct, that the Song founding was successful *because* it emphasized civil rule and de-emphasized military rule, not because military success was the precondition for establishing a government by civil

officials.[12]

Taizu's military record may have proven that he possessed the Mandate, but Taizong's historical position was more ambiguous. Taizong's successful campaign against the Northern Han in 979 was partially aided by the measures Taizu had taken to weaken them. Flushed with victory, Taizong moved directly to attack the Liao and seize the Sixteen Prefectures. But a Liao counter-attack crushed the Song army, forcing him to flee the battlefield. Although Taizong's two Sixteen Prefectures campaigns (he launched a second one in 986) were total failures, they were still offensives. From the perspective of Song historiography, Taizong's intentions were good if his execution was not. He blamed his generals (many of whom had been quite successful under Taizu), but his failure was clear nonetheless.

It was left to Zhenzong to accept the existence of the Liao. As a palace-reared emperor, he could be excused for being less martial than his father or uncle. Later Chinese statesmen and historians felt that Zhenzong's concessions to the Liao were excessive, while conceding that dealing with the avaricious and warlike northern barbarians had always been difficult, even for the Han and Tang. Now that the dynasty was on the defensive, Zhenzong was portrayed as preserving it from the invading barbarians. Thus, since it was assumed that the Liao emperor wanted to destroy the new dynasty and conquer China, Zhenzong displayed great courage when he risked himself to drive off the invading Liao army at Chanyuan. In the negotiations that ended hostilities, he made formal concessions which included an annual indemnity, but the Liao were forced to give up their assumed designs on China, ostensibly making an even greater concession. In that respect, Zhenzong was both heroic and successful. Furthermore, based on the erroneous assumption that the Liao wanted to destroy the Song not only before but also after the Chanyuan Covenant, the court continued to believe that only the constant vigilance of the army kept the empire safe throughout the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. It was not until 1126 that this imagined successful northern defense

finally collapsed before the invading Jin armies, the same armies that had just destroyed the Liao empire.[13]

The Southern Song court and later historians conflated the Liao and Jin dynasties into a generic, constant, barbarian threat, and the *terra irredenta* of the Sixteen Prefectures, conceded to the Liao at Chanyuan, became the most obvious example of weakness in the face of that threat. But the Sixteen Prefectures were already a concrete symbol of the imperfect formation of the dynasty in the eleventh century. Their original strategic significance had given way to their place in the ideological construction of Song history, where they obtruded into any attempt to gloss over their concession to the Liao. The Liao emperor could be called "the Kitan ruler" in internal Song documents, thus denying the existence of the Liao empire or the imperial dignity of its ruler, but the non-conquest of the Sixteen Prefectures could not be camouflaged and, from the perspective of the Song court, provided the legitimate gravamen for continued Song hostility. This Song position ignored the legitimacy of Liao grievances against Taizong's unprovoked attack on their territory, which Liao threats to invade during the eleventh century gave credence to the Song's fears.[14] Moreover, from the teleological perspective of historians writing later in the twelfth century, when the Jin had overrun all of north China, and in the thirteenth century, when the Mongols were destroying the Song, the strength and intentions of the steppe empires were foregone conclusions. But in the tenth century, the simplifying, heuristic devices of Song weakness, Liao (and Jin) intentions, and the south-first strategy were not yet fully formed or reified. The nascent Song empire was still strong; its internal politics remained vital, personal, and uncertain; and the outcome of the military campaigns could not be foreseen.

Underneath all of the rhetoric of empire, however, was an internal political battle for power within the new Song government. At first, only the intrinsic value of real military power provided a reliable hedge against the uncertainties of the political marketplace. But, as

the dynasty gained stability and the value of political power within it increased, the most powerful generals traded in their armies for good administrative positions and closer personal ties to Taizu. In this, they were only following Taizu, who leveraged his military position in the Later Zhou dynasty into supreme civil and military power in the Song.

War and personal politics

For Taizu, war was not only a means to acquire territory, but also the basis of his political power. His military and political fortunes were dynamically linked, facilitating and dependent upon each other. Taizu used the personal ties he had developed as a general both to take power and to disarm most of the potential military threats to his new dynasty. He first settled his internal military problems and then used military conquests to manage his political problems. The dynasty as a political unit was tied to Taizu's person so closely that in the early years, they were effectively one and the same. By the time he died in 976, Taizu had, by a series of military and political successes, made himself and his empire strong. But it was not clear whether the power that Taizu had personally acquired would transfer to his successor.

Taizong succeeded to the throne without any of the accumulated political or military capital of his elder brother, Taizu. His succession also had something of the flavor of a *coup d'etat* about it, albeit within the Zhao family, both because his claim that Taizu intended him to succeed in place of Taizu's own sons was suspect, and because many believed that he was responsible for Taizu's early death.[15] But Taizong's goal as emperor was much simpler than his brother's. He wanted to take control of the empire his brother had already built, not construct a new one. Taizong's problem, then, was to find a way to claim Taizu's legacy.

War was the obvious answer. Taizong used a campaign against the Northern Han kingdom to place himself directly in command of his brother's most powerful generals, a position of supreme command he had never before held, and to prove, by success in war, his fitness to be emperor. Although the campaign was only a partial victory, Taizong was now sufficiently blooded, and his generals sufficiently embarrassed by their part in the failure, to concentrate his energies on internal political consolidation. Seven years later, he sent a second

expedition to take the Sixteen Prefectures that was similarly defeated.[16] While the failure of the second campaign did not unduly discomfit Taizong, it strongly suggested to most court officials that the Song army was incapable of taking the Sixteen Prefectures and generated some well-deserved hostility on the part of the Liao.

Zhenzong came to the throne without any of the political uncertainty of either his uncle or his father. War, which for Taizu and Taizong had been a useful political tool, was only a dangerous problem for Zhenzong. War with the Liao seemed to threaten the existence of the empire. His father's failures marked the end of the Song military expansion and the shift of the Song army to, with a few minor exceptions, a wholly defensive posture. And while previously the Liao had mostly limited themselves to counter-attacks against Taizong's invasions, during Zhenzong's reign, they began attacking Song territory in force. Zhenzong's military objectives were always defensive – to prevent the Liao from destroying the empire, rather than to expand the power of the empire or himself. As such, it is not surprising that when he concluded the Chanyuan Covenant in 1005, he and his officials regarded it as a successful negotiation. Within a few years, the covenant would be execrated and used as a political tool in ministerial battles for power, but it endured for over a century.[17]

The founding of the Song thus ended without a climactic, decisive battle, or even a dramatic final event of any kind, but rather with what appeared in retrospect to be an unseemly capitulation resulting in a dishonorable peace. Still, during Taizu and Taizong's reign, neither the emperors nor their officials had any reason to regard their empire as weak. And even for Zhenzong, it was only afterward that the larger implications of the treaty dawned on him, and then only when stridently brought to his attention.[18] Taizu did not win every battle or even every campaign he undertook, but he knew in war victory was never certain and that individual defeats could be redeemed as long as he was politically stable. In the tenth century

then, failure in war was a military and, possibly, political problem, not a dynastic character flaw.

While the internal political use of war was important in the creation of the Song, it should not overshadow its more direct, external application in extending the borders of the empire. A war of words still preceded and continued alongside recourse to arms. This was an attempt to treat external military problems as if they were internal political ones and throw a decent rhetorical cloak over the naked use of force. Ultimately, however, the Song army decided the issue. And although Taizu and Taizong demanded unconditional surrender from the kingdoms they were attacking, both were willing, with the exception of Taizong's dealings with the Liao, to negotiate that surrender.

Conquest by war and negotiation

If the rhetoric of empire could not conceal the fact that almost every state resisted incorporation until the Song army forced them to do so, it could still serve as a framework for diplomatic negotiations during the military campaigns. Politically, Taizu first acted like the emperor and then convinced his comrades and subordinates to treat him like the emperor. Militarily, he treated the rulers of the states he was trying to conquer as already conquered and then forced them to submit. Taizu wanted to conquer the southern kingdoms with a minimum of effort and damage either to his army or the kingdom he was attacking. This was only practical – he wanted to conserve his military resources for further campaigns and he expected to rule the territory after it was conquered. The easiest way to accomplish both goals was to remove the existing rulers and take over their administrative machinery. From Taizu's perspective, the best outcome would be if a ruler simply submitted to him and took up a comfortable, but supervised, life in the Song capital. But without the motive force of war, no southern ruler was likely to submit. The fortunes of war controlled both the speed and direction of negotiations.

Fighting and negotiating were not separate activities, but two aspects of the bargaining that attempted to resolve certain political relationships without the total destruction of either side. War for Taizu, and Zhou Shizong before him, was explicitly a process that encompassed fighting and negotiating. The primary targets of Song Taizu's southern campaigns were the rulers and, to a lesser extent, the officials of the southern kingdoms. All military action was ultimately aimed at convincing them to surrender control of their territory. To that end, all of the southern campaigns directed their efforts toward seizing the capitals of the various kingdoms and thus the kingdoms' rulers, their officials, and the seats of their governments. Because the

campaigns achieved their military objectives, they also achieved their political objectives.

Taizong at first continued this practice, allowing the last Northern Han ruler to surrender once it was clear that the Song army was on the verge of breaching the defenses of his capital, but he entirely abandoned it when he attacked the Liao. The Liao formed a special case because, at least as originally articulated, the intention of attacking the Sixteen Prefectures was to take only that piece of territory, not to entirely destroy the Liao government. Unlike Taizu's treatment of the southern kingdoms, Taizong did not even offer to negotiate before beginning his campaign. This was particularly strange given that the Liao had been trying to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Song for some time. Taizong had thus burned the diplomatic bridge behind him as he advanced, leaving only the possibility of a complete military victory or a complete defeat. Had he been willing to negotiate as he advanced, and perhaps even as he retreated, he might have been able to obtain some sort of compromise agreement. This is not to suggest that the Liao would have been willing to give up the Sixteen Prefectures – only a complete Song victory could have secured them – but to emphasize that the negotiations that eventually did take place under conditions extremely unfavorable to the Song could have taken place earlier, under less disadvantageous conditions. By the time Zhenzong was forced to negotiate, the Liao emperor, bolstered by years of mostly victorious campaigns and backed by the hardened attitudes of his court, demanded much more than merely being left in peaceful possession of the Sixteen Prefectures.

The Liao had been in possession of the Sixteen Prefectures since 938, when Shi Jingtang, the emperor of the Later Jin dynasty, officially ceded the territory to them in return for their help in establishing his dynasty. Most of the population was Chinese, and the cities, which were economic engines for the Liao empire, were dominated by the Chinese. Indeed, the entire territory, while not particularly productive compared to the rest of China, was the center

of agriculture, craft, and merchant activity in the Liao empire as a whole. The southern edge of the Sixteen Prefectures, the Guannan (lit: "south of the passes") region, was critically important for its strategic north–south passes. Zhou Shizong seized the Guannan region from the Liao in 959, leaving it in Song control when the Later Zhou fell. Thus, at the beginning of the Song dynasty, the Song held the most critical passes of the Sixteen Prefectures, the Guannan region, and the Liao held the, for them, economically critical remainder of the Sixteen Prefectures.

Since the Sixteen Prefectures campaigns were not immediately directed against the Liao government, neither the Liao emperor nor his court officials were directly or immediately threatened by the Song invasion. This gave them the time, not to mention the distance, to formulate and construct their response undisturbed. The strategic value of the passes surrounding the Sixteen Prefectures was in the forefront of both Song and Liao considerations during the Song invasions. Control of those passes was the necessary first step to any military action against the Liao court; and therefore, any attempt to seize them would be seen by the Liao court as ultimately aimed at it. Any claims by Song officials that they were "only" trying to regain territory which rightly belonged to the Chinese court were either disingenuous or a teleological attribution by later historians. Taizong's statement after his second failed campaign that he was "only trying to make the barbarians flee into the desert,"[19] even had it been true, would hardly have been comforting to the Liao court. Even so, because imperial rhetoric also formed the basis of Song–Liao negotiations, and because the Song couched their claims to the Sixteen Prefectures in terms of their rights as the legitimate successor of the Tang dynasty rather than military need, the Liao court had to translate their military position into a rhetorical form that made their intentions clear to the Song. This explains why the Liao insisted that the Song accept the title of emperor (*huangdi*) for the Liao ruler; not necessarily because they wanted to be a Chinese dynasty themselves

but because only by forcing such an unpalatable piece of rhetoric on the Song could they ensure that their superior military position would always be recognized. Otherwise, the Song court could have contented itself with the same rhetorical superiority that had comforted the Han and Tang when their military exploits against the steppe had failed.

The Chanyuan Covenant lasted for over a century not only because the Liao held a superior military position which they were not interested in exploiting for territorial gains, but also because any Song discussion of changing that situation was confronted early on by rhetorical markers which immediately reminded the court of its inferior military position. While it was not difficult to ignore those rhetorical markers or to discount any of the military problems, the effort to do so made the weakness of the Song position obvious. If near-rhetorical parity had been the result of attacking the Liao early on when the dynasty was militarily strong, what might happen beginning from a position of weakness? Few at the Song court during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries seem to have felt that peace with the Liao was worth the rhetorical cost, but the lasting legacy of the Chanyuan Covenant, the last act of the Song creation, was that the Song–Liao border remained peaceful for over a century. This stability was the result of both military and rhetorical victories by the Liao.

The Liao court did not merely react to the founding of the Song when it impinged upon their territory or that of the Northern Han, it also chose not to respond to overtures from the southern Chinese kingdoms for joint action against the Zhou and then the Song. Clearly then, Liao interests were not a simple reflection of Chinese interests. At the same time, Liao actions had a tremendous impact on the process and progress of the Song creation and a realistic appraisal of the Song creation must take account of the Liao perspective.

The Liao perspective on war with the Song

The Liao emperors were not merely failed contenders for the Chinese throne and it is inappropriate to assign them exclusively sinocentric values. It is true that they clearly had designs on the central plains of China before 947, but after that, as Wang Mingsun has pointed out, they concluded that it was beyond their capabilities to directly rule the area.[20] It is also worth noting that the Liao dynasty actually took the name "Liao" during its brief control of Bianliang (Kaifeng), the Chinese capital, in 947.[21] Even so, after 947, Liao policy was clearly oriented toward influencing and indirectly controlling the central plain rather than directly ruling it. To that end, the Liao government gave military support to the Northern Han kingdom both for defense and in its failed attempt to displace the Later Zhou dynasty in 954.

Both the Later Zhou and Song governments regarded Liao military support of the Northern Han as a direct act of aggression against them. By most definitions, it was, but it was still not an attempt to take over the central plains, just to weaken the dynasty ruling it or insert their own client government. In fact, after their support of the Northern Han invasion of 954, the Liao showed remarkable restraint in limiting their military actions to the defense of Northern Han territory and the Sixteen Prefectures. The Song government, which felt that the Sixteen Prefectures were rightfully theirs, may have regarded the Liao defense of the Sixteen Prefectures as an aggressive act, but the Liao surely cannot be blamed for defending land that had been theirs for several decades and which the Song had never possessed. More to the point, the Liao did not take advantage of the Song army's southern campaigns to invade the empire, despite repeated attempts of the southern kingdoms to induce them to do so. After Taizong's second Sixteen Prefectures campaign, however, Liao tactics changed. Raiding was replaced by full-scale invasions as the Liao seized the tactical, battlefield, initiative. They retained this initiative until the

1120s, and it underlay all Song–Liao negotiations.

Song emperors and officials completely misunderstood the reason for their loss of initiative; although the profound effects it had on Song–Liao relations were clear. It was argued during the Song that the earlier system of border defenses, a line of fairly independent generals who aggressively and proactively engaged the Liao, had been extremely effective and it was only the gradual removal of those generals for political reasons that allowed the Liao to invade so successfully during Zhenzong's reign. Although institutional changes were important, this argument assumed that the Liao had always been trying to invade and that it were only changes in Song policy that changed the outcome of events. It does not seem to have occurred to Song emperors or officials that Liao actions had changed. By failing to distinguish between border raids and invasions, the latter sometimes led by the Liao emperor himself, the Song government conflated local, tactical, maneuvers taken for tactical reasons, with tactical maneuvers taken for strategic reasons.

The Song government was unable to parse Liao tactical and strategic policy not because they did not understand the difference in their own policies, but because they could not credit the same sophistication to the Liao. Their understanding of the Liao was tightly constrained by certain historiographical conventions. Liao strategic policy concerning the central plains of China and China itself was fairly consistent from 947 until the 1120s: they wanted a stable relationship with themselves in the dominant military position. Liao tactical policy, however, changed as the situation warranted in pursuit of their strategic policy. Thus, in the early years of the Song, the Liao restrained their military and attempted to negotiate a stable relationship with the Song where they retained control of the militarily significant Sixteen Prefectures. Even the destruction of the Northern Han could be overlooked. The Song could not accept Liao control of the Sixteen Prefectures for the same reason the Liao wanted them – the state which held the passes would be in a strategically

advantageous position. Taizu avoided the issue and died before he had to face it, but Taizong ran headlong into it. Even after Taizong had invaded their territory, the Liao restrained themselves.[22] Unfortunately, as much as the Liao wanted to negotiate and hoped that continued restraint on their part might preserve that possibility, Taizong would not negotiate in the wake of his failures.[23] Taizong's strategic policy was unlimited and, because he assumed that the Liao policy was also unlimited, he could see no room for a negotiated, compromise settlement. Furthermore, had Taizong negotiated, he would have allowed the Liao to translate their superior military position into a superior diplomatic position. By refusing to negotiate, he retained the diplomatic initiative, a situation that the Liao temporarily accepted.

They did not wait long after Taizong's death to force the issue. It was clear that Taizong would only have negotiated under the most extreme military pressure. Since the Liao were not capable of actually threatening the existence of the Song, large-scale invasions during Taizong's reign would have been useless and wasteful.[24] But, with the change in emperors, the tempo and strength of Liao attacks increased. Zhenzong intended to continue his father's policy of not negotiating, but the Liao court resolved to bring the Song to the bargaining table and reap the benefits of their superior military position. Border raids escalated into invasions led by Liao emperor Shengzong and his bellicose mother, the dowager empress Chengtian.[25]

Disastrously, the Song court saw the increasingly serious Liao attacks as merely an increase in military activity caused by a decrease in the effectiveness of its northern border defenses. Thus, rather than attempting to negotiate an end to the invasions, the Song court concentrated on strengthening its border. But if the Song court did not, or could not, understand that the Liao were raiding in order to bring about negotiations, the Liao court for its part could not be sure if Song efforts to improve its military situation while refusing to negotiate were due to continued unwillingness to negotiate or a desire

to improve its bargaining position before negotiating. The policy debates at the Song court make it clear that the former, rather than the latter, was the case – negotiation was never discussed as a possible solution to the problem, but the Liao court had no way of knowing that. So, while both sides would have agreed that the general problem was an unresolved dispute over territory, neither court was able to clarify the finer points of the situation and make them known to the other court as the basis for negotiation until the prospect of a decisive battle which both sides wanted to avoid forced them to do so. Thus the years of fighting that led up to the Chanyuan Covenant was a prolonged period of miscommunication during which the two sides tried to make their respective positions clear through the hazy medium of war. Unfortunately, the general misunderstanding of each others' intentions led to dramatically different interpretations of the military events. For example, although the Liao were not at first trying to capture any of the major cities that formed the Song northern defense line, the Song thought that each time one of those cities held out during a Liao attack, the city had been successfully defended. This eventually forced the Liao to directly assault those cities in order to get their point across.

The Liao army, a virtually all-cavalry force, was ill equipped for siege work. All of its advantages lay in mobility, so by refusing to accept battle in the open field, the Song forced the Liao army to take the tactically unattractive option of attacking fixed positions. While this strategic and tactical policy would not allow the Song to retake the initiative, it made the Liao pay a high price for their gains.[26] The Liao could only advance their position by increasingly costly and risky campaigns that enervated both sides. Whether this was an explicit policy of the Song or a policy failure is moot, warfare during Zhenzong's reign became a war of attrition. The Song successfully improved their bargaining position with the Liao by making the cost of bringing military pressure to bear mutual. By the time negotiations began, both sides were eager for a settlement and agreement was

quickly reached.

It was very important for Song statesmen to establish that it was the Liao, not the Song, who initiated negotiations in 1004. But this is simply further proof that they did not understand that the point of the war for the Liao was to reach a negotiated settlement. While the Song were attempting to designate who won and who lost, the Liao were negotiating a hardheaded and canny treaty. It is thus not surprising that the Chanyuan Covenant was so much to the Liao's advantage. It was not a question of what the military situation was – there could be no objective evaluation of that – but of the subjective understanding of how the results of the battles related to the means and goals of the two sides. The Song did not understand either the Liao means or goals, but the Liao were fully conversant with Chinese values. As much as the military situation was open to interpretation, the Liao were certain about what the Song wanted. This gave them an immense advantage during the negotiations, the reverse of the situation during the Song conquest of the south. Zhenzong's court forgot what his uncle's court had known so well: the endgame of any military action was the negotiation that obtained the political objective. Unlike Taizu, who had very clear objectives politically and militarily, Zhenzong had no goal beyond weathering the crisis. As little as he understood war, he understood negotiation even less. But Zhenzong and his court could not know that they had just played out the final act of the Song founding.

War and the creation of the Northern Song

War was central to the creation of the Northern Song in a variety of ways beyond merely acquiring territory. The detailed investigation of war at its most basic level, the actual course of the campaigns themselves, allows us to illuminate the internal political formation of the Song court, the rhetorical formation of the dynasty, and the Chinese understanding of the use of military action for political goals during the tenth century. Moreover, the campaigns allow us to deconstruct several Song myths about their founding. Those myths have been crucial to our present understanding of the course of Song history standing, as they do, as explanations for certain fundamental "characteristics" of the Song dynasty as a whole. Virtually all of those myths serve to explain Song weakness.

Song weakness is not, as John Labadie would have it, a "red herring" with the Song as militarily strong as any earlier dynasty but simply faced with stronger opponents.[27] Military power is always relative, both to one's opponents and to one's goals. The outcome of battle can be rhetorically manipulated, but facts on the ground are the starting point for all negotiations and later characterizations. Those facts, or at least their military significance, are often forgotten as the events recede into memory. Thus, Song Taizu was successful in conquering the south because his military and political power was equal to the task. He failed to conquer the Northern Han because in that case, it was not. The same held true for Taizong and Zhenzong. But the same was also true for the Liao. They failed to install the Northern Han regime in the central plain in 954, or to preserve it against Taizong in 979, but they succeeded in establishing a peaceful border with the Song and retaining control of the Sixteen Prefectures. And since the Liao did not intend to destroy the Song in 1004, then, given that the Chanyuan Covenant was so much to their advantage, it seems unlikely that they wanted to destroy the Song later in the

eleventh and early twelfth centuries either.[28] There was thus, for more than a century, no successful defense of the Song northern border that collapsed during the Jin invasions, because there was never a threat. Indeed, the very fact that it was the Jin rather than the Liao who took the central plain is telling. Generalizations about Song weakness have made it possible to conflate the military problems of the conquest of the south, the conquest of the Northern Han, the failure against the Liao, war with the Xi Xia, and the loss of the central plain to the Jin into a single picture. Yet the campaigns themselves defy the generalizations. And by returning to a historical account of the Song creation based on those campaigns, we may take a first step toward separating the Song's military problems into their component parts and breaking the specious connections that ignore both the years and decades separating the major military events of Northern Song history and the intentions of their opponents.

[1] Fan Zuyu, *Tangjian*, in Biji Xiaoshuo Daguan, Taibei: Xinxing Shuju, 1981, vol. 40, p. 350. Michael Dennis Freeman has also translated an abridged version in his "Lo-Yang and the Opposition to Wang An-Shih: The Rise of Confucian Conservatism, 1068–1086," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1973, p. 145.

[2] **Ibid.** Freeman, pp. 145–50. Of course, opposition to Wang Anshi's reforms colored the opinions of many of those historians.

[3] Li Tao, Xu Zizhi Tongjian Changbian [hereafter XCB], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2004, 1.4. The entire account of the events leading up to the official overthrow is contained in XCB, 1.1–5. See also Sima Guang, Sushui Jiwen, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006, 1.1–3. A report from Zhen and Ding Prefectures arrived on January 31 that a Liao–Northern Han army had invaded the empire. Zhao Kuangyin left Kaifeng two days later leading an army to oppose it. That night, at Chenqiaoyi (Chen Bridge Station), supposedly unbeknownst to Zhao, several officers decided to place him on the throne. The army returned on February 3 and the Song dynasty was founded on February 4.

[4] For a discussion of the symbolic aspects of legitimation in Chinese history, see Hok-lam Chan, Legitimation in Imperial China, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984, pp. 3–48.

[5] See Yao Yingting, "Lun Tang-Song zhi Ji de Tianming yu Tianming Sixiang," in Songshi Yanjiu Lunwenji, Zhengzhou: Henan Chubanshe, 1982. For the Han dynasty development and formalization of the Mandate of Heaven, see Michael Lowe, Chinese Ideas of Life and Death, London: Allen & Unwin, 1982, chapter 13, especially pp. 151–8. Also see Herlee Creel, The Origins of Statecraft in China, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

[6] The name "Liao" was originally adopted as the name of the Kitan empire in 947 during their occupation of Kaifeng. Although it was occasionally changed back to "Kitan," for example, following the death of the Liao emperor Yingzong in 982, XCB 23.533–4, for the sake of simplicity, I use "Liao" throughout this book.

[7] *Chanyuan zhi meng* (澶淵之盟) has usually been translated as "The Treaty of Shanyuan" in English. The standard western work on the Covenant is David Wright, From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh Century China, Leiden: Brill, 2005, which now supersedes Christian Schwarz-Schilling, Der Friede von Shan-yuan (1005n. Chrs.): Ein Beitrag zur Geschishte der Chinesischen Diplomatie, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959. I would like to thank Dr. Schwartz-Schilling for giving me a copy of his otherwise difficult to acquire thesis several years ago. A.F.P. Hulsewe made some important criticisms of this work in his review of it, A.F.P. Hulsewe, The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 31/3 (1968), 638–40. David Wright has persuasively argued that "*meng* (盟)" was really a "covenant" rather than a "treaty." See Wright, pp. 73–8. I read the character 澶 as "chan" because it is the most common modern standard Mandarin pronunciation. See Luo Zhufeng, Hanyu Dacidian, Shanghai: Hanyu Dadidian Chubanshe, 2008, vol. 6, p. 178, and Morohashi Tetsuji, Daikanwa Jiten, Tōkyō: Taishūkan Shoten, 1955–1960, vol. 7, p. 7207. The only other pronunciation provided in *Hanyu Dacidian* is "dan." R. H. Matthews, Mathew's Chinese–English Dictionary, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943, p. 777, provides the reading "shan," as do several older dictionaries including the Kangxi Dictionary. Christian Scharz-Schilling points out that the "shan" reading is a historical pronunciation ("The Treaty of Shanyuan – Then and Now: Reflections 1000 Years Later," footnote 1). While it has become convention in English language scholarship to use the "shan" reading, I find it hard to justify reading this one word in a nonstandard modern Mandarin pronunciation.

[8] Sima Guang, Zizhi Tongjian, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1992 [hereafter ZZTJ], 292.9525–6. Shizong's "製治之方" and Wang Pu's "侯天下既平".

[9] ZZTJ, 292.9525–6 and Xie Juzheng, Jiu Wudai Shi, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995 [hereafter JWDS], 128.1679–81. In the JWDS account, Wang Pu's plan is called a "平邊策". See also Edmund Worthy's translation of the ZZTJ version in Edmund Worthy, "The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1973, pp. 15–17.

[10] XCB 9.204–5. The anecdote was originally recorded in Shao Bowen, Wenjian Qianlu, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008, 1.4. See also Worthy, "The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions," pp. 18–20, and his long note on the discussion between Zhao Pu and Taizu, pp. 89–90, n. 7.

[11] Many later historians were unaware of Taizu's failures because they relied upon sources like Chen Bangchan's *Songshi Jishi Benmo*, and other works which compiled selections from the chronological records into topical entries. The failed campaigns were either ignored or significantly downplayed in these secondary compilations. See also Freeman, p. 146.

[12] This idea was present even in the first elucidations of the plan to conquer China by Wang Pu; first institute good government and then military success

would naturally follow. See footnote 8.

[13] It is worth noting that the Song had allied with the Jin to destroy the Liao.

[14] For renegotiations of the Liao annual payments see Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh Century China*, pp. 205–19, and Tao Jingshen, "Yü Ching and Sung Policies Toward Liao and Hsia, 1042–1044," Journal of Asian History 6/2 (1972): 114–22. For Liao threats during the 1074–5 border crisis see Klaus Tietze, "The Liao-Sung Border Conflict of 1074–1076," in Studia Sino-Mongolica Festschrift für Herbert Franke, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979, pp. 127–51, and Christian Lamouroux, "Geography and Politics: The Song-Liao Border Dispute of 1074/75," in Sabine Dabringhaus and Roderick Ptak (eds.), China and Her Neighbors, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997, pp. 1–28.

[15] Edmund Worthy provides an extensive list of articles discussing the Taizu–Taizong succession. See Worthy, p. 10, n.9. The general consensus is that Taizu did not intend Taizong to succeed him.

[16] For the Sixteen Prefectures, see Nap-yin Lau, "Song-Liao Chanyuan zhi meng Xintan," in Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Jikan, vol. 61, part 3 (September 1990), Taibei, pp. 693–747. The first footnote in Nap-yin Lau's article lists twenty-two articles on the Chanyuan Covenant and the Sixteen Prefectures in Chinese, Japanese, and English.

[17] For a discussion of the post-Chanyuan politics at the court of Zhenzong, see Karl Olsson, "The Structure of Power under the Third Emperor of Sung China: The Shifting Balance After the Peace of Shan-Yuan," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974.

[18] XCB 62.1389. Cited and translated in Olsson, "The Structure of Power under the Third Emperor of Sung China: The Shifting Balance After the Peace of Shan-Yuan," pp. 156–7.

[19] XCB 27.617.

[20] Wang Mingsun, Song, Liao, Jinshi Lunwen Gao, Taibei: Mingwen Shuju, 1988.

[21] It is interesting that they did not even try to carry out this declaration in Chang'an or Luoyang, the capitals of the Tang dynasty. This seems to indicate that they were not trying to obtain historical legitimacy, only contemporary legitimacy.

[22] Toqto'a, Liaoshi, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1996, 9.102.

[23] Taizong might have been willing to negotiate if he had won several battles and then withdrawn of his own accord, but, if he had won, he would not have withdrawn.

[24] For the enormous effort involved in launching raids on the Song, see Nap-yin Lau, "Song-Liao Chanyuan zhi meng Xintan," pp. 695–9.

[25] It might be more accurate to say that Dowager Empress Chengtian led the invasions accompanied by her son, Liao emperor Shengzong. The dowager

empress dominated Shengzong's court until her death in 1009. "-there was no question who was ultimately in control; …the new emperor [Shengzong] was thoroughly dominated by his mother, who continued to browbeat and sometimes even strike him in public even when he was a grown man." She also had her own *ordo* of ten thousand cavalry. Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," in Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (eds.), The Cambridge History of China, vol. 6, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 90–1.

[26] Unless, of course, the purpose of the tactical defense was to wear down the Liao in preparation for a return to an offensive tactical policy. Since Song strategic policy was clearly defensive during Zhenzong's reign, despite the rhetoric of offense in the emperor's defensive actions, there was no understanding of the use of tactical defense as a prelude to a later offense.

[27] John Richard Labadie, "Rulers and Soldiers: Perception and Management of the Military in Northern Sung China (960–ca. 1060)," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1981, pp. 11–12.

[28] Christian Lamouroux, "Geography and Politics: The Song-Liao Border Dispute of 1074/75," p. 15.

2

Historiography, methodology, and Song military and political history

The primary sources for studying Song military and political history are almost exclusively histories written by men who identified themselves as historians. These histories were written with specific didactic programs and certain expectations of audience and reading strategies. In the present work, I often read against the grain of the didactic program to answer questions different from the sources' writers. Just as importantly, I tie these sparse accounts of events together through dense explanations. An audience with a different background and reading strategies requires a different approach to writing. Like the maps provided within this book, my explanations provide context for separated points in unfamiliar territory.

My intervention within the narrative is extensive because the sources seldom explain explicitly why events played out as they did or how and why emperors, officials, and generals made their decisions. This is particularly true with respect to strategic or political decision making. There are only four strategic discussions presented in the sources and discussed in this book. I argue that the first two, Wang Pu's 955 (Chapter 3) and Zhao Pu's 966 (Chapter 5) strategies for the conquest of China, are more accurately seen as an act of political theatre and a teleological attempt to create historiographical order, respectively, rather than accurate reflections of strategy. The other two, Zhao Pu's strategy for slowly weakening the Northern Han (Chapter 6) and Taizong's justification after the fact for his second failed campaign to capture the Sixteen Prefectures (Chapter 9), are

directly quoted and discussed in the text, along with a handful of minor discussions of operational choices. This is not to say that such discussions did not take place at the Later Zhou, Song, Liao or other courts, but that we lack sources for them. It is unlikely that any critical strategic discussions, whether military or political, were recorded.

The reader is presented with a chronological narrative in which the events extracted from the primary sources are intertwined with my own explanations of motivations, strategic evaluations, and connections between events. Except where specifically indicated, the analysis is mine and the footnotes refer only to what occurred and when it did so as reported in the primary sources. My choices are not meant as a repudiation of the roads not taken, but rather as a set of steps through a dense mass of primary sources often unmarked by secondary scholarship. While I am cognizant of the extensive literature on narratives and the various contemporary theoretical arguments concerning it, I am not declaring myself a member of the *doxa*, in Hayden White's nomenclature, by rejecting one of several possible narrative theories in favor of just "doing history."[1] Rather, my primary goal is to explain what happened in the military and political spheres, how and why those events affected each other, and how, cumulatively, those events influenced the course of Song history more broadly. Song dynasty theories of history writing are themselves complex enough to require separate study, and considerable effort to navigate the tides of their moral program. Influenced by the primary sources themselves, and my own stress on chronology, I have created a narrative focused on imperial orthodoxy and, secondarily, a particular Confucian discourse on history itself.

The primary sources on Song military and political history are plentiful for certain aspects of these areas of study, but not for others. There is almost no material on the lives of ordinary soldiers, for example, some material on battle tactics, and extensive records on the operational and strategic level of campaigns.[2] Similar biases affect

politics, where the goings on at court are well covered, with little outside of that circle. This is not surprising, of course, even if it disappoints those interested in these poorly recorded areas. Studying the interaction of war and politics at the early Song court takes advantage of the strengths of the primary sources.

The outcomes of battles and wars, whether military or political, mattered. It also mattered that specific events had specific causes and effects. Chronology is also important because conditions changed over time in response to the outcomes of political and military events. If events had turned out differently, then subsequent events would also have changed. Those events had their own contexts that affected both the outcomes and the effects of those outcomes. Had the Song dynasty under Song Taizu's leadership failed militarily, for example, it would have collapsed and been overthrown by another dynasty. By the time the second emperor, Song Taizong, failed militarily in 980, however, the dynasty was more stable and withstood his incompetence. It was precisely because Taizu won the majority of his military campaigns and garnered enough political power (and used it cannily enough) to create a solid polity that the Song dynasty did not become the sixth dynasty to fall in the tenth century. That polity was strong politically, militarily, and institutionally, as well as socially, including the bonds of loyalty among the elites and within the army.

Methodologically, I see the study of the military and political events of the late tenth century as a necessary first step toward both understanding the process of dynastic formation and also a new foundation for a cultural history of the eleventh century. Generals, for example, were important during the Song founding, a process that lasted until at least 1005. Military men and their culture did not simply disappear with the Song founding in 960, or even with the rise of the bureaucratic class starting in 983.[3] Edmund Worthy made precisely this point in his 1976 dissertation:

> To many scholars the Sung founding has meant the decisive sweeping away of what amounted to a militocracy in the Five Dynasties. In addition to the

> defusing of T'ai-tsu's comrades' military power… the court began to appoint civilian officials to oversee or replace military men serving in local government positions. All this has been taken as evidence that a government of civilian rule quickly re-emerged. No doubt, the Sung dynasty in total assessment did mark a brilliant ascendancy of civilian bureaucratic government. But we should not retrospectively infer from this fact that the opening decades of the dynasty were so thoroughly devoid of the military and its influences. Indeed, this study will demonstrate that of the various integrative factors shaping the course of the early Sung, the military was the most crucial and preponderant.[4]

It seems unlikely that military culture ever went away despite the increased political, social, and economic power of the literati class during the Song. If war, as I argue, was so very prevalent and important up until 1005, then military culture at all levels was very likely flourishing, not declining in the half century after the Song founding. Once we recognize that military culture at all levels was not only not erased by the Song founding, but was in fact prominent during the creation of the dynasty, our view of how the dynasty was formed should change accordingly.

Politics and historiography

Any account of the Song founding is intimately bound up in the historiography of the sources. It is important therefore to explain why and how those histories were shaped the way they were, and how a set of concerns particular to the place of war in forming political identities in China was reiterated in those constructions into the twentieth century. A full description of Song historiography even for this narrow issue alone would require its own study, so I will confine myself here to a general outline of the forces that shaped the characterization of the founding.[5] At root, the political history of China beginning in the eleventh century directly affected the portrayal of war during the Song founding. This extended beyond war to military accomplishments, generals, and the place of war in Chinese culture.

Military and political events are particularly prone to source bias and teleological history writing. Song and later historians took it as a given that Song Taizu's overthrow of the Later Zhou dynasty was legitimate because the Song dynasty was a successful, and therefore legitimate, dynasty. Many of these historians served the Song dynasty, and therefore were ideologically committed to the legitimacy of the dynasty. Yet the other side of that teleological perspective was the knowledge that the Song could not capture the Sixteen Prefectures region from the Liao empire, thus leaving an imperfect dynastic establishment. Still later historians, acutely aware of the Song's loss of north China to the Jurchen Jin in the early twelfth century, projected back an even greater fundamental military weakness. The imagined Song tradeoff of a flourishing civil culture in exchange for military debility that seemed obvious starting in the eleventh century would not have been apparent or even familiar in the tenth century.

Previous studies of early Song political and military history have been chronologically flattened in order to produce a specific cultural

interpretation: that the Song dynasty was created and made into a stable empire by the imperial establishment of a dominant civil culture rather than through military or political struggle. This interpretation started in the eleventh century when statesmen and historians inscribed their cultural meaning upon the dynastic founding.[6] The only way to read against the grain of that eleventh century meaning is to reintroduce chronology into the history in order to recover the simple description of events and the causal relationship of political and military actions that have hitherto been disaggregated into their respective subdisciplinary narratives. My insistence on reintroducing chronology into Song history has a good measure of historiographical irony, as I will discuss here.

Sima Guang (1019–1086) stands at the center of any discussion of sources for the beginning of the Song dynasty.[7] His *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governing* is one of the best sources for the history of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, his collection of anecdotes, *Sushui Jiwen*, provides many vital stories for the early Song, and his entire historical approach strongly influenced Li Tao (1115–1184), the author of *The Long Draft of the Continued Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governing*, the best source for Song history in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Lee Tsong-han has argued that Li Tao directly followed Sima's belief in "government as the key to establish adequate order in the society, while at the same time arguing for a limited government that interferes in the [sic] society in the minimum degree. He believed in a hierarchical order of delegated authority."[8] Li explicitly modeled his work on Sima's and, though he differed in some small respects, saw *The Long Draft* as an extension of the *Comprehensive Mirror*. In many respects then, our understanding of the early Song dynasty comes from Sima Guang.[9]

On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, however, assert that "Read in light of modern historiographical standards, the *Comprehensive Mirror* does, however, leave something to be desired. In spite of its elegant narrative flow and rigorous use of evidence, the work is not, in the

end, a history. It is a chronicle that treats events in isolation without contextual interconnection with related and circumstantial happenings. It views the past through the narrow political lens of the rise and fall of dynasties, giving very short shrift to institutional, intellectual, economic, and social developments."[10] Ng and Wang's position requires some explanation, particularly their contention that the *Comprehensive Mirror* is not a history.

At least as I understand Ng and Wang's position, the *Comprehensive Mirror* is not a history because it does not present any analysis beyond its chronicle of events. Their other characterizations seem more or less unremarkable. Indeed, Sima Guang himself might well have argued that his point was to view the past through the political lens of the rise and fall of dynasties. He initially conceived of the *Comprehensive Mirror* as a digest of relevant examples of how rulers succeeded or failed for the emperor alone. All institutional, intellectual, economic, and social developments were subordinate to the narrow political concerns of the emperor. It is extraordinary that one of the greatest historical works ever written was composed for a single person.

On the most basic level, the *Comprehensive Mirror* is simply a chronicle of isolated events; it is organized solely by chronology. Sima Guang only occasionally comments on the history he has laid out. Yet it is a serious misreading of the text to imagine that the events are isolated or lacking in context, or that circumstantial events were not integrated within the whole. Even in a massive work of 294 chapters (not counting a separate 30 chapters of notes on sources), Sima and his collaborators were forced to pick and choose which events they covered and to pare down the ones that made it into the final draft. Contrary to what Ng and Wang appear to be arguing, Sima Guang and his collaborators presented a deeply analytic and contextual history through their choice of data and its arrangement.[11] He also was extremely precise in his use of language, using different terms for a historical figure dying based upon what he believed their actual rank

was, for example, as opposed to the title they claimed. Sima's arguments were explicit to his audience if the emperor chose to be sensitive to them. It is also worth considering that a work directed toward the emperor himself had to be somewhat circumspect in its message. Sima could not be condescending in his explanations or pontificate to the man who sat on the throne. If the emperor had questions, Sima Guang could always be summoned to clarify any issue. The end product was consequently understated sometimes to the point of opacity, and at a minimum, a dry text.

Scholars during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) took steps to remedy Sima's understatement. Yuan Shu (1131–1205) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200) felt that Sima Guang was too subtle in his message, and that it was too difficult to extract the proper meaning from the *Comprehensive Mirror* without guidance. Yuan Shu created a new historical form based upon Sima's work, reorganizing the text around 239 episodes. The resulting history, the *Narratives from Beginning to End from the Comprehensive Mirror*, extracted the intertwined events that explained how an episode transpired.[12] Of course, this diminished the historical effect of understanding that many disparate activities might simultaneously be taking place leading up to significant episodes. It also required the historian to designate explicitly what the significant episodes were for a given period. While one might not take exception to the episodes chosen by Yuan, it nevertheless remains true that his influence has tended to cause subsequent historians up to the present to focus research and debate on those episodes.

Zhu Xi initiated his own reorganization of the *Comprehensive Mirror*, the *Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror*, as an extension of his larger philosophical program.[13] Zhu was a great promoter of Learning of the Way Confucianism, sometimes called Neo-Confucianism in English, and he used history as evidence of the underlying Principle (*li*) that pervaded everything. As Ng and Wang describe it, "Although Zhu Xi embraced a time-negating philosophical

universalism based on perennial classical truth, he could be quite sensitive to temporal change and the qualitative alteration that followed."[14] Zhu admired Sima's work, though he did not always agree with his evaluations of historical events. His reorganization and commentary broke down Sima's chronology in order to emphasize a particular Learning of the Way message.

The far more important work for our purposes here is Li Tao's *Long Draft of the Continued Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governing*. Li submitted his work in parts over twenty years beginning with 17 chapters in 1163, followed by 100 chapters in 1169, and 470 chapters in 1174 (the work was completed in 1183, totaling 980 chapters). Lee Tsong-han speculates that these first three submissions of the *Long Draft* to the court might have been politically timed as a way for Li Tao to discuss court policies.[15] Li followed Sima Guang's chronicle format as well as his overall approach to history. Song China's situation in the twelfth century was in several respects a more intense version of its situation in the eleventh century. Instead of signing a distasteful agreement with the Liao after the failure to capture the Sixteen Prefectures, the Song court faced existential military problems after the loss of the capital, Kaifeng, and all of north China to the Jurchen Jin. Politics at court was similarly polarized into competing factions.

The histories that provide our primary sources for the Song founding were written against the backdrop of military failures and vicious court politics, first in the eleventh century and then in the twelfth. Our received understanding of Song military history is therefore strongly influenced by a series of political and cultural conditions external to the conquest itself. Like the Confucian moral programs of Song historians, these outside influences biased the interpretation of the events in a manner that downplayed the significance of war and the importance of military culture to the Song. In reaction, perhaps, to the overwhelming importance of warfare in their own time, Song historians tried to make war less central to the

dynasty's founding, or at least to insist that the military was always subordinate to civil rule. This was a political argument that the dynasty was founded by a subordinated military and so there was no reason why a subordinated military could not successfully defend the dynasty. Since Song Taizu was both the dynasty's founder and responsible for the major period of successful conquest, this rise of civil power had to be attributed to his policies, rather than, as I argue, to Taizong's political needs following military failures (Chapters 8 and 9).

There were at least four historiographical periods that created and repeated the idea of Song military weakness, the eleventh century, the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911), and the twentieth century.[16] In each of those periods, there was a very specific motivation for characterizing the Song dynasty in that way, and successive characterizations drew upon the inherent credibility of earlier arguments to that effect. This is not to deny that there were valid reasons for arguing that the Song did not achieve all its military goals. Song military history before 980, however, is a story of relentless conquest, and when one considers the vast scope of territory captured, it should be clear that the Song army in the first two decades of the dynasty was one of the great military machines in history. The sources consistently argue against such a characterization, in both primary and secondary works, for reasons external to the events themselves. This is a usual and expected aspect of sources and histories; my interest here is two-fold, to separate the events from their later interpretations, and to clarify those interpretations in order to show cultural change in later periods, particularly the eleventh century.

Shortly after the Chanyuan Covenant ended hostilities between the Song and Liao empires in 1005, Song officials began to attack that agreement as a humiliating failure. Setting aside the question of the provisions of that agreement until they will be discussed in Chapter 10, it is clear that much of the initial impetus for attacking the

agreement in the Song court was due to internal politics. Kou Zhun (961–1023) was felt to be the official most responsible for concluding the covenant and he benefited politically when it was initially seen in a positive light. His opponents attacked the agreement, successfully persuading emperor Zhenzong that it had been a humiliating failure. Kou was subsequently demoted in 1006 and the agreement's evaluation began its downward slide.[17]

The Chanyuan Covenant was immediately followed by thirty years of peace, inadvertently producing a political deadlock at the Song court. In the absence of a crisis and supplied with a growing pool of qualified officials, the emperors, Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) and then Renzong (r. 1022–1063), were able to balance court factions against each other. This was politically expedient for the emperor and allowed him to retain great power while keeping his officials weak. All that changed when the Tangut Xia (Xi Xia) began a war in 1038. One of the effects of the war was temporarily to convince the emperor to vest great power in the hands of a single group of officials, leading to what came to be known as the Qingli Reforms (sometimes also called the Lesser Reforms). Those reforms were short-lived; once the crisis was over, the previous balance between factions was restored. The reforms' lasting influence was to demonstrate that only a military crisis could convince an emperor to empower a political faction with unchallenged authority. Not only was this lesson learned politically, it was learned culturally as well because many of the statesmen involved in the Qingli Reforms were also cultural figures. Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), one of the leaders of the reforms, would write histories of the Tang dynasty and the Five Dynasties, among his many accomplishments.

Ouyang Xiu was convinced that the Song dynasty in his time was a powerful empire culturally but militarily weak.[18] He presented that result as part of a conscious choice by the Song founders to suppress the military and favor civil officials even at the cost of some battlefield success. Ouyang may well have believed that Song Taizu

planned for the Song government to be dominated by civil officials, as was the case in the eleventh century. He unquestionably thought that civil dominance of the government was right and proper, and that allowing generals to become powerful was dangerous and destabilizing.[19] Ouyang knew from his reading of Tang dynasty and Five Dynasties' history that powerful generals could destroy a government. Seen in that light, it made sense to trade internal stability for a more circumscribed border. Ouyang was also a political player, and it must have been clear to him that a state of military weakness opened the door to political control of the government.

The next major political reform in the eleventh century was Song emperor Shenzong's (r. 1067–1085) New Policies (or Great Reforms) first introduced in 1069 under the direction of Wang Anshi (1021–1086).[20] Wang convinced Shenzong (r. 1067–1085) that his policies would strengthen the state militarily and allow the Song to redress the wrong of the Chanyuan Covenant. While it is not clear that Wang actually intended ever to go to war, perhaps just using the possibility to gain political power, it was Shenzong's underlying conviction that the state was militarily weak that made Wang's proposals attractive.[21] Ouyang Xiu had initially sponsored Wang, but later turned against him. Yet the emperor and his officials seem to have been convinced by the 1060s that the dynasty was fundamentally weak. Shenzong wanted a prime minister who would build up the state and go to war. Wang Anshi duly instituted his plans for building up the economic power of the state, while mostly putting off the emperor on any larger campaigns. Once Wang was out of office, however, Shenzong launched a massive campaign against the Xi Xia in the 1080s. The campaign was costly and only partly effective, foreclosing a follow-on campaign to capture the Sixteen Prefectures.

Sima Guang led the opposition to Wang Anshi. This was true politically as well as culturally, with almost the entirety of the Northern Song pantheon of great writers, poets, philosophers, and historians collecting around Sima in resistance to the reforms.[22]

Toward the end of his life, Sima was placed in charge of the government after Shenzong died and immediately unwound all of Wang Anshi's reforms. He also pulled back from Shenzong's aggressive military stance. Sima's perspective on military matters was complex, and he often included far more detail in his battle accounts than, for example, Ouyang Xiu for the same event (e.g., The Battle of Gaoping discussed in Chapter 3). Fundamentally, Sima was extremely cautious about military adventures, though whether this was the result of his historical studies or his opposition to Wang Anshi's at least rhetorical promotion of military action, or both, is unclear. In any event, Sima and his party's time in power was brief, leaving the reformists to retake control over the government in time for a great military disaster.

The reformists were firmly in control of the government at the end of the eleventh century and took the opportunity actively to persecute their political opponents. Whatever the merits of their other policies, it seems clear that they did not maintain military readiness. This would have been less of a concern if they had maintained the Chanyuan Covenant with the Liao, but instead they allied the Song to the rising Jurchen power north of the Liao. After a century of peace, the Song court decided to renege on the agreement in order to destroy the Liao and capture the Sixteen Prefectures. While the Jurchen attacked from the north, the Song army was supposed to invade from the south and capture Yanjing, the same city that Taizong had fallen back from in 980. The Song army in the 1120s was even less successful and, after being driven off, ultimately relied upon the Jurchen to capture the city. The Song court was then forced to pay for the recovery of the Sixteen Prefectures; it held the territory only briefly before a dispute with the Jurchen led to a Jurchen invasion and the fall of north China. The Song capital, emperor, and retired emperor were all captured in 1127.

Song historians writing after the loss of north China to the Jurchen in 1127 sought a sort of "original sin" that explained that

catastrophe. Following the eleventh century explanations of Ouyang Xiu and the cultural consensus of statesmen at that time, the answer was the tradeoff made by Taizu of a weak military in exchange for a flourishing civil culture. The “Disaster of the Jiankang Period” became further evidence of Song military weakness rather than being seen as a very separate event that took place more than a century after the Chanyuan Covenant, or even forty years after Shenzong’s failed campaign against the Xi Xia. The Song never regained the north, and spent much of the next century and a half on the defensive, once again insisting upon cultural and ritual supremacy and legitimacy, while excusing military failure.

The Mongols destroyed the Jurchen in 1234, and then the Song in 1279. The dynastic histories of the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties were compiled under Mongol auspices after the Mongols unequivocally unified China. In hindsight, the Song narrative became one of civil flourishing and military weakness. Song culture in every respect except the military was looked back upon with great appreciation in the Ming dynasty that succeeded the Mongols in 1368. Of course, Ming scholars were often at pains to ignore or skip over the influence of Mongol culture on China during the period of Mongol rule, and its continuation into the Ming itself. Song culture was a much more acceptable touchstone for Ming literati. Border problems with the Mongols reinforced a general Ming hostility to the Mongols, while at the same time offering a positive parallel with Song history. Where the Song had failed to establish the proper border with the steppe threat, the Ming had succeeded. And, like the Song, the Ming faced a continual steppe threat that demonstrated the fundamental barbarity of those steppe peoples.

The Ming response to Mongol raids was the creation of the Great Wall, a fortification that evolved over time as a result of policy indecision at court rather than military strategy.[23] By constructing a border, the Ming marked off China from the steppe and legitimized their rule retroactively and teleologically by fixing the proper extent

of their founding to what they had conquered. The Song border was further south and so it was less militarily successful, though certainly legitimate when compared to the Liao or even Jin. Later historians have tended both to imagine the Great Wall as the "correct" or established border between China and the steppe, and to see it as a marker of eternal Chinese defensive-mindedness.[24]

The Manchus overthrew the Ming, establishing the Qing dynasty in 1644. In the wake of that conquest, the new Manchu government was extremely sensitive to Ming loyalist sentiment. This was a particular problem for historians because a Ming loyalist who might want to write a history of the Ming could very easily fall afoul of the Qing authorities. From a Ming perspective, the glorious founders of the Qing dynasty were dangerous barbarians who overthrew a legitimate dynasty. Once again, military failures did not negate cultural legitimacy; to some extent, it almost seemed as if they enhanced it. Moreover, the Manchus were not Chinese and their claim to legitimacy as rulers of China was based on their military success, not cultural prowess. As with the Song, great military power became a marker of the non-Chinese barbarians in contradistinction to China's powerful culture but weaker military.

A Ming loyalist looking for a way to discuss Ming history could disguise that intention by writing about Song history instead. This was what Wang Fuzhi, an early Qing historian, did when he wrote about the Song in his *Discussions on Reading the Comprehensive Mirror* (*Du Tongjian Lun*) and *Discussions on the Song* (*Song Lun*). Of course, these works were not solely concerned with making veiled attacks on the Qing, and it is because they contain a great deal of well-reasoned historical discussions that they remain worth reading today. Yet underlying his views, "Wang regarded the barbarians as creatures of another species, to whom the normal rules of interhuman relations did not apply. He went so far as to say that it would be perfectly acceptable for the Chinese to defraud, attack, or even kill them… Wang rejected Qing legitimacy, and he begrudged their using the

notion of *zhengtong* to manipulate history."[25]

Similar masked anti-Qing sentiments even manifested themselves in descriptions of the martial arts. Huang Zongxi (1610–95) wrote an epitaph for Wang Zhengnan (1617–69) in which he attached Wang's "internal" martial arts to Zhang Sanfeng, a Daoist during the Song dynasty, which was superior to Shaolin's "external" martial art. Shaolin was a Buddhist temple and here represented the external or obvious power of a foreign practice. Daoism, by contrast, was Chinese and internal or hidden. Even though the foreign practice appeared more powerful on the surface, the hidden Chinese power was actually greater.[26] Wang Fuzhi and Huang Zongxi are just two examples of the early Qing restatement of the place of war in Song history. For Ming loyalists, Song, and thus Ming, power was internal, hidden, and in reality, more powerful than losses to foreigners might make it seem.

The final period for using the Song dynasty to stand in for a later period was the twentieth century. Chinese governments and historians were acutely aware of China's weakness with respect to the West beginning in at least middle of the nineteenth century. The Opium War (1839–42) shocked some Chinese officials into seeing how far behind China had fallen. Western powers took advantage of China's military weakness to exploit it, initiating a "century of humiliation" that called into question the value of Chinese culture.[27] Some Chinese thinkers believed that they could adopt Western technology and military methods while retaining the essence of Chinese culture. Other thinkers argued for the extremes of completely rejecting all of Chinese culture or rejecting all of Western culture. In all of the range of opinions, the manifest military superiority of the West raised profound questions of the value of Chinese culture separate from military prowess, and the relationship between military power and culture.

In an interesting parallel to the eleventh century, both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong argued in the 1930s and 1940s that the Opium War was the defining event in modern Chinese history.[28] Like the statesmen on the opposite sides of the political struggle at the

Song court who agreed upon a fundamental military crisis that could only be resolved by giving their side control over the government, Chiang and Mao agreed upon the modern Chinese crisis that warranted their sole control of China. China's modern history seemed, if not to echo, at least to cast in a sympathetic light, the Song dynasty's problems. Certainly there was a repetition of the use of history to argue for political power.

From the twentieth century perspective, China and its cultural power were always in conflict with foreigners and their military power. China, in this construction, was by nature peaceful, focused on civil culture, and defensively oriented; foreigners, whether they were from the steppe or the sea were inherently warlike, martial, and offensively oriented. This idea was reinforced by European imperialism, the early twentieth century's world wars, and Japan's invasion and occupation of China. Song China's perceived military failings fit neatly into this understanding of Chinese history as a whole. This also explained such apparently odd anomalies as the economically powerful, technologically advanced Song dynasty being unable to translate those advantages into military dominance.

The cornerstone of the modern interpretation of the Song dynasty as one of civil strength and military weakness was laid by Fang Hao in his 1954 book *Songshi* (*Song History*) in which he asserted that one of the Song dynasty's fundamental policies was "*zhongwen qingwu* (Emphasize the civil, De-emphasize the military)."[29] I have pointed out elsewhere that the phrase "*zhongwen qingwu*" was not a Song dynasty policy, and in fact, first appears in a famous Ming dynasty novel set during the Song dynasty, the *Erke Paian Dunqi*.[30] Chinese historians in the twentieth century were sympathetic to the problem of cultural versus military power in the wake of China's disastrous early modern history. In both China and Taiwan, the end of the Chinese civil war was also imperfect. China did not conquer Taiwan and continues to dwell upon that failure until the present day for political reasons. Even in Taiwan, historians were sensitive to the

imperfect and uncompleted conquest that brought into question legitimacy on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. Most of the first generation of historians in Taiwan were Mainland Chinese scholars who fled the Communist regime. Modern China, like the Song dynasty, was incomplete because of military failure.

Song political history

Politics, as the preceding discussion has highlighted, permeated every aspect of pre-modern history writing. Perhaps as a consequence of this, political history as a subfield of Song history has languished until very recently. An earlier generation of scholars, like Jiang Fucong, Nie Chongchi, and Fang Hao, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, were steeped in the primary texts and worked to explicate the history of the Song dynasty through those texts.[31] This sort of traditional scholarship was invaluable in establishing a modern perspective on the fundamental sources, but it was not informed by any larger theoretical or subfield specific concerns. These scholars were creative and perceptive within the bounds of traditional historiography, and they had unparalleled sinological skills. To some extent, however, their orientation tied them more tightly to traditional interpretations of Chinese history.

It is also true that Taiwanese scholars, along with some Mainland Chinese and Japanese scholars, continue to write in a very different style than Western, particularly American, academics. Western academics emphasize the analysis of the data and placing that analysis in a theoretical and methodological context. Western academic discourse therefore spends a greater amount of time explaining not just why things happened, but also why the data discussed is important. Taiwanese scholarship, following very much along the lines of traditional Chinese scholarship, tends to focus on lining up the appropriate quotes from primary sources with a very light explanation of the data. This is because they believe that the analysis and thesis of their scholarship is apparent in the sources presented, a position consistent with the practice of Sima Guang, as I have argued earlier. Some Western academics have mistakenly seen this style of scholarship as lacking in argument and merely collecting quotes. A more American style of academic writing became more popular

toward the end of the twentieth century, particularly as Taiwanese students obtained Ph.D.s from American universities before returning to Taiwan to work. At the same time, however, the older style of scholarship persists, along with a certain measure of hostility or, at least, suspicion of post-modern theory.

A good example of the persistence of this older style is Lin Ruihan's political history of the entire dynasty. It is an excellent traditional history, strong on primary sources but light on analysis or explanation.[32] A more American-style work is Liu Jingzhen's extremely impressive work specifically on the early Song period, which brings to bear fascinating new insights and approaches.[33] Unfortunately, Professor Liu did not continue her work on this subject and her example did not prompt other scholars in Taiwan to take up the study of political history. Fang Cheng-hua has attributed some of the reason for the poor state of Song political history in Taiwan to the focus on individual literati to the exclusion of other perspectives. Hence, for example, historians discuss the New Policies instituted during Song Shenzong's reign only with respect to Wang Anshi.[34] Professor Fang has also shown in another article that the reporting of casualty figures during a war, he uses the example of the Song-Xi Xia War of the early 1080s, could be significantly distorted by politics at court.[35]

Deng Xiaonan has also lamented the state of Song political history, in her case attributing the current situation to the playing out of all of the previous issues, like the struggle between reformers and conservatives. Her solution is to try to break free of the previous paradigms of political history, turning instead to the "Ancestral Rules (*zuzong zhi fa*)" as a method to uncover the connection between political power and the construction of political culture. Professor Deng describes the Ancestral Rules as an evolving set of paradigms that characterized the relationship between the imperial family and the government, and influenced the political culture of the Song.[36] At a minimum, major scholars in both Taiwan and Mainland China are

dissatisfied with the state of Song political history. Previous scholars were too accepting of the received paradigms and important "events," or those lines of research have simply been so thoroughly studied as to stunt further work.

This study of war and politics can therefore be seen as part of this search for a new approach to political history as well as a new approach to military history. Chen Feng's work has also stressed the connection between military affairs and government or political matters, with a substantial inclusion of imperial and military marital connections.[37] In an earlier article, I argued for the political and institutional importance of the Battle of Gaoping, particularly the way that the battle was fought, including the marriage ties that resulted among the generals and Song Taizu.[38] War had a significant impact on politics and its place in Song political culture has not been explored beyond the anodyne and incorrect view that it was simply deemphasized. It is also true that politics had a significant impact on war.

Song history and Song military history

Two recent general histories of the Song dynasty in English, *The Cambridge History of China,* volume 5 and Dieter Kuhn's *The Age of Confucian Rule* ably summarize the state of the field in all languages.[39] Cambridge University Press has also published a comprehensive history of China written by professors from Beijing (Peking) University and translated into English, directly presenting the current Mainland Chinese perspective on Song history.[40] In Song military history, Chen Feng has surveyed Mainland Chinese works published since 2000.[41] These resources make a full and general account of the state of Song history unnecessary and redundant; a more narrow focus on the issues related to the field of Song military history, however, still requires some background on twentieth century historiography. Several recent works outside of military history are also particularly important to a general understanding of the field as a whole, and where the present work fits into both military history and Song history.

Chinese history was not much studied in the West before the latter half of the twentieth century, and before China opened up to the outside world in 1978, very few scholars from any country had the opportunity to visit China in any capacity. Within China, poverty, communist ideology, and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) dramatically circumscribed research in Chinese history, whether modern or pre-modern. Even research in Taiwan, where many of the best Chinese scholars fled after 1949, was initially limited by poverty. Consequently, many scholars turned to Japan to learn about Chinese culture, particularly for pre-modern periods. This was especially true in "Middle Period" Chinese history, roughly from 750 to 1550. Great scholars like Denis Twitchett (1925–2006) in Tang history and Robert Hartwell (1932–1996) in Song history learned Japanese, studied in Japan, and absorbed Japanese perspectives on Chinese history.

There were two schools of Japanese thought on Middle Period

(*chusei*) Chinese history, the Marxists associated with Tokyo University, and the Kyoto School, which followed the ideas of Naito Torajiro [Konan] (1866–1934), who was a professor at Kyoto University. Naitoist historiography (*Naito Shigaku*) stressed the differences between the Tang and Song dynasties, and argued that the modern period in China began during the Song.[42] The main stress of both of these schools was on economic and social history, particularly the construction of elite society and its changes from the Tang to the Song dynasty. This perspective carried over well into Western academic practice where, as Richard Davis put it: "…historians in China tend generally to view their own history in a more holistic way, stressing the interrelatedness of economics and politics, society and culture. Western historians, in contrast, tend to define themselves as students of economy or politics, society or culture…"[43]

Song military history has until recently not been one of the narrow fields of specialized study in the West, nor has it received much attention in Asia. Huang K'uan-chung and Wang Zengyü have been two notable exceptions, along with Li Tianming and Liang Tianxi, though none of these scholars has paid particular attention to the beginning of the Song dynasty.[44] The main study of the early Song has been Edmund Worthy's 1976 Ph.D. dissertation, "The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes and Political Institutions." Worthy was primarily concerned with the institutional history of the early Song dynasty, but included a summary of the campaigns of conquest derived from the *Songshi Jishi Benmo*. He argued that the reason the Song did not become the sixth transitional dynasty in the tenth century, was the result of institutional developments:

> -his [Taizu's] policies for controlling the palace armies were in large measure inspired by Chou Shih-tsung's [Zhou Shizong] efforts. He was able, though, to capitalize on the Shih-tsung's mistakes [sic] and made several institutional improvements to insure that his regime would not become a sixth transitory dynasty.[45]

For Worthy, and before him, Wang Gungwu, the fundamental dynastic

problem for the Song founding was finding or achieving the correct institutional structure.[46] They argued that the evolution of the bureaucratic and military structures from the Tang through the Five Dynasties and into the Song were the means by which power was recentralized around the throne. Tang power had been too decentralized even before the An Lushan Rebellion (755–63), with the rebellion and the subsequent Huang Chao Rebellion (875–884), destroying central power. Over the course of the Five Dynasties, since Song government was the continuation of the northern regimes' institutions, power was gradually brought under central control, a policy continued by the Song government. But neither Taizu nor Zhou Shizong would have been able to affect institutional change had they not first won battles and succeeded in politics. Wise institutional changes, in turn, fed back into military and political success. Without military and political success, however, existing power holders could ignore institutional changes.

Outside of Worthy's extremely influential dissertation, in English until the 1990s, there was only Herbert Franke's "Siege and Defense of Towns in Medieval China," in *Chinese Ways in War* published in 1974 and John Labadie's 1981 dissertation, "Rulers and Soldiers: Perception and Management of the Military in Northern Sung China."[47] My 1996 dissertation, "War and Creation of the Northern Song dynasty," provided a detailed campaign account of the military history of the Later Zhou dynasty from 954 continuing through the Song dynasty until the Chanyuan Covenant in 1005.[48] The late Shui-lung Tsang's 1997 dissertation, "War and Peace in Northern Sung China: Violence and Strategy in Flux, 960–1104 AD," extended the campaign accounts into the beginning of the twelfth century.[49] These more battlefield focused studies have been accompanied by related research such as Cheng-hua Fang's 2009 book, *Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875–1063)*, and David Curtis Wright's 2005 *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China*.[50] A number of articles

could also be mentioned, but my goal here is only to argue that Song military history is receiving more attention. Taken as a whole, while starting from a small base, research on Song dynasty military matters has increased markedly in the last twenty years.

Outside of military history, the two most important books on Song history in recent years are Naomi Standen's *Unbounded Loyalty* and Ruth Mostern's *Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern*.[51] Standen herself would likely not characterize her book as falling into Song history alone, particularly since its subtitle is: "*Frontier Crossing in Liao China*," but her description of how the separation of the Song and Liao empires developed into an ethnic border, at least conceptually, is critical for reading against the grain of Chinese historians. These historians assumed that all Chinese people owed their loyalty to the Song as the legitimate Chinese dynasty. Mostern's book is critical to our understanding of how a government extends its control throughout its territory. Political and military histories never really explain how, once the war or struggle for political power is over, authority is actually exercised. Mostern shows that authority was imposed at the ground level by the imposition of supervision, backed by the threat of real force, onto an area.

War and politics

War's role in early Song political history has not been previously acknowledged. Partly, this was a result of certain historiographical conventions that portray successful military activity as the natural outcome of possessing the Mandate of Heaven and the attendant moral virtue required to possess it, and partly, out of portraying Taizu as the ruler who reversed the chaos and war of the Five Dynasties period by demilitarizing politics. The effect of those conventions only shows up in the explicit interpretation of the events rather than in the primary sources themselves. The primary sources support the interaction of war and politics, both internally and externally, through their emphasis on chronology and sequence. Political strength leads to military power; military success increases political strength. Presented another way, unity is critical for military success. Hence, external military success is a marker of unity and political strength. External military failure or rebellion is a marker of political weakness and lack of unity. Early Song emperors were not absolute in their powers or sure of their throne, so their political and military strength, and the vicissitudes of their political and military struggles for power, directly affected their institutional and cultural efforts.

Song political culture and Song culture as a whole were deeply marked by the particular military and political events of the first forty-five years of Song rule. Song Taizong's political weakness and military failures, for example, were a major reason why he dramatically increased the government's reliance on the exam system for recruiting officials. The fact that the period of conquest ended in 1005 with a diplomatic agreement, the Chanyuan Covenant, rather than a climactic victory profoundly affected eleventh century politics and culture. These military and political events did not just happen, and the results of those events were interpreted and reinterpreted in particular and revealing ways.

Conclusion

This study of the Song founding is aimed at excavating the critical role of the interaction between war and politics in forming Song dynasty culture and institutions. The description is not “mere” chronological narrative that recounts one thing after another. Rather, it reveals the process by which the early Song emperors and statesmen created the institutions and culture of the dynasty. That process was driven as much by personalities as by contingent military and political events. Later statesmen and historians derived or imposed their own description of that process, imputing particular meaning to those events. The Song founding came to be seen as an example of the tradeoff between controlling the military and having a weak military. Song civil culture flourished, in this interpretation, at the cost of military failure.

Without these later interpretations of the Song founding, however, the picture is much more about an emperor, Taizu, who cannily, but not infallibly, used military power to enhance his political power, which in turn created a virtuous cycle where political power enhanced his military power. He was followed by a militarily incompetent emperor, Taizong, whose military and political failings forced him to stabilize his position by murdering his family members. Taizong’s problems also led him to rely more upon the then powerless civil elites for officials recruited through the exam system. Taizong was the transitional figure in Song culture, straddling the divide between Five Dynasties’ rulers and the emergent Song imperial culture. Taizong’s son, Zhenzong, inherited a throne, a war, and an emergent culture. Taizong trained Zhenzong to be a lesser emperor than he was and in doing so, further raised the standing of the new official bureaucratic class.

These broader meanings can only be seen after we examine the military and political events that interacted to form the milieu in

which these personalities operated. This study is a step in that direction, and an attempt to restore the perspective of the historical actors of the Song founding. In so doing, I am not attempting to privilege the meaning of these events for the Song founders over those of later statesmen and historians. Rather, my intention is to further clarify how later meanings differed from those of the men involved. This study lays a foundation for understanding how meanings and perspectives changed over time.

[1] Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," History and Theory, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb., 1984), pp.1–33.

[2] Elad Alyagon is currently doing some promising research on the lives of ordinary Song soldiers. For aspects of the hand-to-hand fighting methods during the Song, but not military tactics, see Peter Lorge, Chinese Martial Arts, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 113–8.

[3] On the rise of the bureaucratic class beginning in 983, see Robert Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 42/2, p. 408.

[4] Edmund Worthy, "The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976, p. 5.

[5] The best brief discussion of Song historiography is Charles Hartman, "Chinese Historiography in the Age of Maturity, 960–1368," in The Oxford History of Historical Writing, 400–1400, vol. 2, edited by Sarah Foot and Chase F. Robinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 37–57.

[6] See, for example, Ouyang Xiu's implicit contrast with the preceding Five Dynasties period, where he blames soldiers for all of the turmoil of the period, "The flourishing or destruction of states in the Five Dynasties was through soldiers," Ouyang Xiu, Xin Wudai Shi, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995, 27.297.

[7] See Xiao-bin Ji's very important biography of Sima Guang, Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China, The Career and Thought of Sima Guang, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005.

[8] Lee Tsong-han, "Different Mirrors of the Past: Southern Song Historiography," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008, p. 48.

[9] Chia-fu Sung has vastly improved our understanding of Sima Guang's historical perspective, adding immense nuance to the notion of what it meant to do official or private history. His research is also vital to our understanding of Ouyang Xiu's work as well. Chia-fu Sung, "Between Tortoise and Mirror: Historians and Historiography in 11th Century China," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010.

[10] On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, Mirroring the Past, Honolulu: University of

Hawai'i Press, 2005, p. 150.

[11] Lee Tsong-han, "Different Mirrors of the Past: Southern Song Historiography," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008, pp. 4–5.

[12] On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, Mirroring the Past, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, pp. 155–6.

[13] Lee Tsong-han, "Different Mirrors of the Past: Southern Song Historiography," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008, p. 19, sees this shift from the *Comprehensive Mirror* to the *Outline and Details* format as a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense.

[14] Ng and Wang, p. 161.

[15] Lee Tsong-han, "Different Mirrors of the Past: Southern Song Historiography," p. 32.

[16] I leave open the possibility that there was also a significant amount of writing about Song weakness during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) by Song loyalists and Southern literati after the Song fell in 1279. The weakness bias may also have permeated the *Songshi* written during this period, but I have not yet come across anything to support this idea.

[17] Karl F. Olsson, "The Structure of Power Under the Third Emperor of Sung China: The Shifting Balance After the Peace of Shan-Yuan," Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1974, p. 142.

[18] For Ouyang Xiu's life, see James T. C. Liu, Ou-yang Hsiu: An Eleventh-Century Neo-Confucian, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967. For his history of the Five Dynasties, see Ouyang Xiu, Richard Davis (trans.), Historical Records of the Five Dynasties, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[19] Richard Davis describes Ouyang Xiu as calling for, with respect to the Five Dynasties period, "the restoration of a reinvigorated *wen* to a position of natural dominance." Richard L. Davis, Wind Against the Mountain, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 18–19. "*Wen*" refers to the civil side of culture or the bureaucracy as opposed to "*wu,*" the military or martial side of culture and the bureaucracy.

[20] The New Policies are usually attributed to Wang Anshi with Shenzong as a somewhat passive actor in the reform movement. I have stressed Shenzong's role here as a direct response to Fang Cheng-hua's pointed, and I feel quite correct, criticism of the literati-centered bias of Song political history. See Fang Cheng-hua, "Chuantong Lingyu Ruhe Fazhan," Taida Lishi Xuebao, 48 (2011), December, p. 169.

[21] The story that Song Taizong was wounded at the Battle of Gaoliang River and was forced to flee in a donkey cart was reportedly recounted by Shenzong himself. Taizong was said to have been troubled by the injury for the rest of his life. It is hard not to read this as an allegory for the dynasty's failure and Taizong's lifelong regret over the disastrous campaign. For the anecdote, see Wang Zhi, Moji, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007, p. 20.

[22] Michael Dennis Freeman, "Lo-Yang and the Opposition to Wang An-Shih: The Rise of Confucian Conservatism, 1068–1086," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973.

[23] Arthur Waldron, The Great Wall of China, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Peter Lorge, "The Myth of the Great Wall," in Demystifying China, edited by Naomi Standen, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013.

[24] Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross, The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security, New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.

[25] Ng and Wang, p. 234. The "*zhengtong*" was the legitimate transmission of the Mandate of Heaven from one ruler to another or one dynasty to another.

[26] Peter Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*, pp. 191–3.

[27] For the "Century of Humiliation," see Julia Lovell, "The Opium War and China's "Century of Humiliation"," in Demystifying China, edited by Naomi Standen, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013, pp. 153–60.

[28] Julia Lovell, "The Opium War and China's "Century of Humiliation" p. 158.

[29] Fang Hao, Songshi, Taibei: Zhonghua Wenhue Chuban Shiye Weiyuan Hui, 1954, p. 66.

[30] Peter Lorge, "The Northern Song Military Aristocracy and the Royal Family," War and Society, Vol. 18/2. 2000, pp. 37–8.

[31] Jiang Fucong, "Song Taizong Jindi mufu kao," in Dalu Zazhi, 30/3 (February 1965), pp. 81–89; Jiang Fucong, "Song Taizu shi Taizong yu Zhao Pu de Zhengzhang," Shixue Huikan 5/3 (1973), pp. 1–14; Nie Chongchi, Songshi Congkao, Taibei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1986; Fang Hao, Songshi, Taibei: Zhonghua Wenhue Chuban Shiye Weiyuan Hui, 1954.

[32] Lin Ruihan, Songdai Zhengzhi Shi, 2nd ed.Taibei: Daxue Lianhe Chuban Weiyuan hui, 1992.

[33] Liu Jingzhen, Huangdi he Tamen de Quanli-Bei Song Qianqi, Taibei: Daoxiang Chubanshe, 1996.

[34] Fang Cheng-hua, "Chuantong Lingyu Ruhe Fazhan," Taida Lishi Xuebao, 48 (2011), December, p. 169.

[35] Fang Cheng-hua, "Zhangzheng yu Zhengzheng de Jiuge," Hanxue Yanjiu, 29/3, 2011, pp. 125–54.

[36] Deng Xiaonan, Zuzong zhi Fa: Bei Song Qianqi Zhengzhi Shulue, Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2006; Deng Xiaonan, "The Perfection of the Civil Official System," in The History of Chinese Civilization, edited by Yuan Xingpei, Yan Wenming, Zhang Chuanxi, and Lou Yulie, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 249–52; and Deng Xiaonan and Christian Lamouroux, "Les 'Règles familiales des ancêtres': Autorité imperial et gouvernement dans la Chine medieval." Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales 59.3 (2004), 491–518.

[37] Chen Feng, Songdai Junzheng Yanjiu, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2010.

[38] Peter Lorge, "The Entrance and Exit of the Song Founders," Journal of Song-Yuan Studies, 29, 1999, pp. 43–62.

[39] Denis Twitchett and Paul Smith (eds.), The Cambridge History of China: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279, Volume 5, Part One, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Dieter Kuhn, The Age of Confucian Rule, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. In addition to these works, *The Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* publishes annual comprehensive bibliographies of Japanese scholarship, broken down by category.

[40] Yuan Xingpei, Yan Wenming, Zhang Chuanxi, and Lou Yulie, (eds.), The History of Chinese Civilization, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Volume three covers the period from 581 to 1525.

[41] Chen Feng, Songdai Junzheng Yanjiu, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2010, pp. 362–87.

[42] My discussion of the Naito hypothesis and its influence on Chinese history follows Hisayuki Miyakawa, "An Outline of the Naito Hypothesis and its Effects on Japanese Studies of China," The Far Eastern Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1955), pp. 533–52.

[43] Richard L. Davis, "The 'Sociologizing' of Sung Studies in Taiwan," Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient (Leiden), Vol. 42, #1 (1999), p. 106.

[44] Huang K'uan-chung, Nansong Difang Wuli, Taibei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 2002; Huang K'uan-chung, Nansong Junzheng yu Wenxian Tansuo, Taibei: Xin Wen Feng Chuban Gongsi, 1990; Huang K'uan-chung, Nansong Shi Yanjiu Ji, Taibei: Xin Wen Feng Chuban Gongsi, 1985; Wang Zengyü, Songchao Bingzhi Chutan, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983, and his update to that volume, Wang Zengyü, Songchao Bingzhi Chutan (Zengding ben), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2011; Li Tianming, Song-Yuan Zhanshi, Taibei: Shihuo Chubanshe, 1988; Liang Tianxi, Song Shumiyuan Zhidu, Taibei: Liming Wenhua Shiye Gongsi, 1981.

[45] Edmund Worthy, "The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes and Political Institutions," Princeton University, Ph.D. diss., 1976, p. 3.

[46] Wang Gungwu, The Structure of Power in North China During the Five Dynasties, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.

[47] Herbert Franke "Siege and Defense of Towns in Medieval China," in Chinese Ways in War, edited by Frank A Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 151–201; John Richard Labadie, "Rulers and Soldiers: Perception and Management of the Military in Northern Sung China," Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington, 1981. The footnotes to Franke's article cite several works in German that have not been widely used.

[48] Peter Lorge, "War and Creation of the Northern Song dynasty," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996.

[49] Shui-lung Tsang, “War and Peace in Northern Sung China: Violence and Strategy in Flux, 960–1104 AD,” Ph.D. diss., 1997. See also, Peter Lorge, War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 17–77.

[50] Cheng-hua Fang, Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875–1063), Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009; David Curtis Wright, From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China, Leiden: Brill, 2005.

[51] Naomi Standen, Unbounded Loyalty, Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006; Ruth Mostern, Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

3

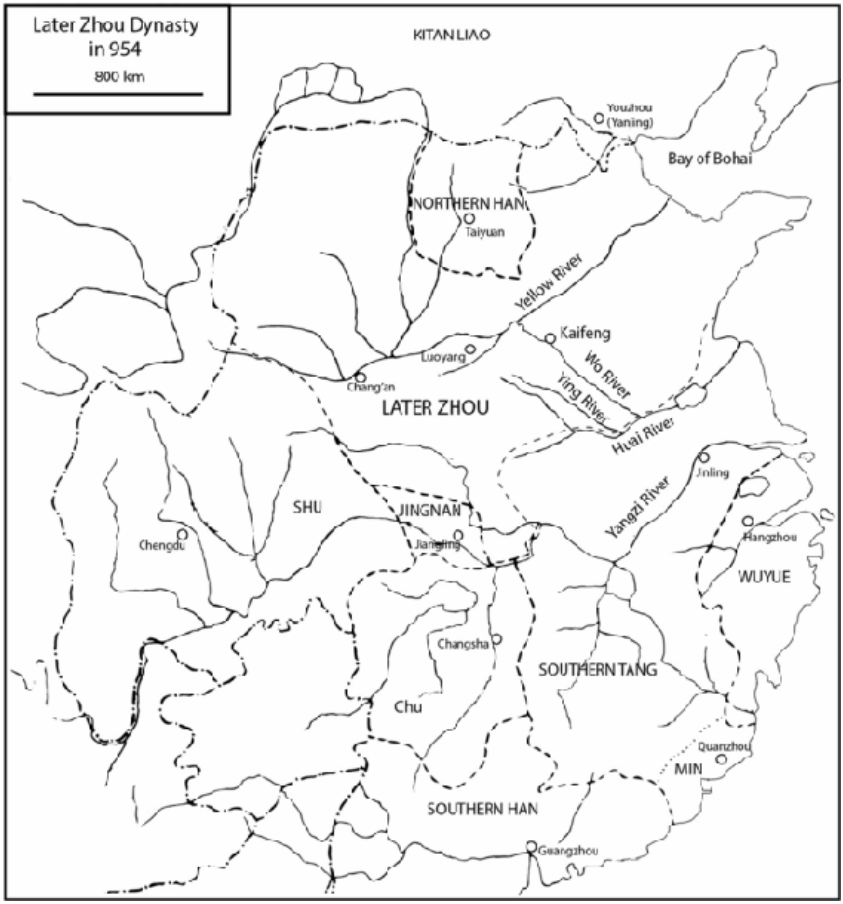
The pivot of the tenth century

As Guo Wei, the first emperor of the Later Zhou Dynasty (951–960), lay dying in 954, he ordered his most powerful generals to swear allegiance to his adopted son and successor Chai Rong.[1] Chai, posthumously known as Zhou Shizong, did indeed ascend to the throne when Guo died on 22 February 954, but his adopted father's efforts to secure him from internal threats were never tested. Within weeks, he faced an external challenge to his power when Liu Chong, ruler of the Northern Han kingdom, invaded, aided by a large force of cavalry sent by his patron, the Liao emperor. This military threat immediately and permanently changed the political calculus at the Zhou court. External military action became Shizong's instrument for internal political consolidation after its effectiveness was demonstrated to him so dramatically in fending off Liu Chong.

Shizong realized that he needed to defeat the Northern Han invasion rapidly and decisively, and rushed to meet the invasion as quickly, and as far from the capital, as possible. Anything less than a decisive victory would probably have ended his reign and the dynasty. The opposing armies met at Gaoping. Shizong won, but only by throwing himself into the battle at a crucial moment. With that single stroke, he proved his fitness to rule in the most unambiguous way possible, through victory in war.

The Battle of Gaoping secured Shizong's throne but also elevated Zhao Kuangyin, the future Song Taizu, to the position near the top of the Zhou army from which he would later overthrow Shizong's son and establish his own dynasty in 960. Shizong followed his success at Gaoping with an invasion of the Northern Han. Although he failed to

destroy the Northern Han, his dramatic and decisive military action at Gaoping temporarily solved his internal political problems. For the moment, he was politically and militarily in control. Yet he had few, if any, other options if he wanted to maintain that control. Only further external military action offered the possibility of increasing his political and military power. He could not have simply tried to maintain his current level of power, even had he been so inclined (which he was not); it had to either increase or decrease. Redistributing power within the existing Zhou state was a zero-sum game in which Shizong could not increase his power without reducing that of someone else, an action that might backfire by provoking increased resistance on the part of the other power holders. In the same respect, rewarding service by distributing power from his own store would decrease his own personal power. These unpleasant alternatives could both be avoided by increasing the stock of power, most concretely measured in a larger number of civil and military positions corresponding to real, as opposed to merely nominal, control over government or military units. That is to say, conquering new territory would provide Shizong with a new stock of rewards to distribute. And since those rewards would come from him, they would add to his authority and power.



1. The Later Zhou in 954

The following year, Shizong directed his officials to submit plans for the conquest of China. This was not only a public act for internal consumption – Shizong occupied most of his five-year reign campaigning – but the political implications of the policy review were clear: the Zhou house was now stable enough to stake a claim to possessing the Mandate of Heaven in the unequivocal terms of military conquest. Any ambitious military man should now direct his energies to that end in the service of the dynasty. Shortly afterward, Later Zhou forces conquered four provinces from the kingdom of Shu and set the stage for a much larger campaign against the Southern Tang.

Shizong's turn toward almost exclusively military actions to

legitimate and strengthen his own position was a political disaster for court officials. For a very brief period after Guo Wei died, it appeared that Feng Dao and the other civil court officials were in a position to influence the new emperor. It was the civil officials who controlled the orderly and peaceful process of installing a new emperor and Shizong, who clearly desired and needed this prop to his succession, was beholden to them for carrying out those ceremonies. Four days after Guo Wei died, on 26 February, Guo's order making Shizong emperor was officially sent out. On 2 March, Feng Dao led court officials in requesting that Shizong attend to state affairs. Following proper form, this request had to be repeated three times before the new emperor accepted. Two days later, he met with officials in a side corridor of the gate of the Wansuidian.[2] It was only on 24 March, after the usual three requests, that Shizong moved into the imperial palace proper.

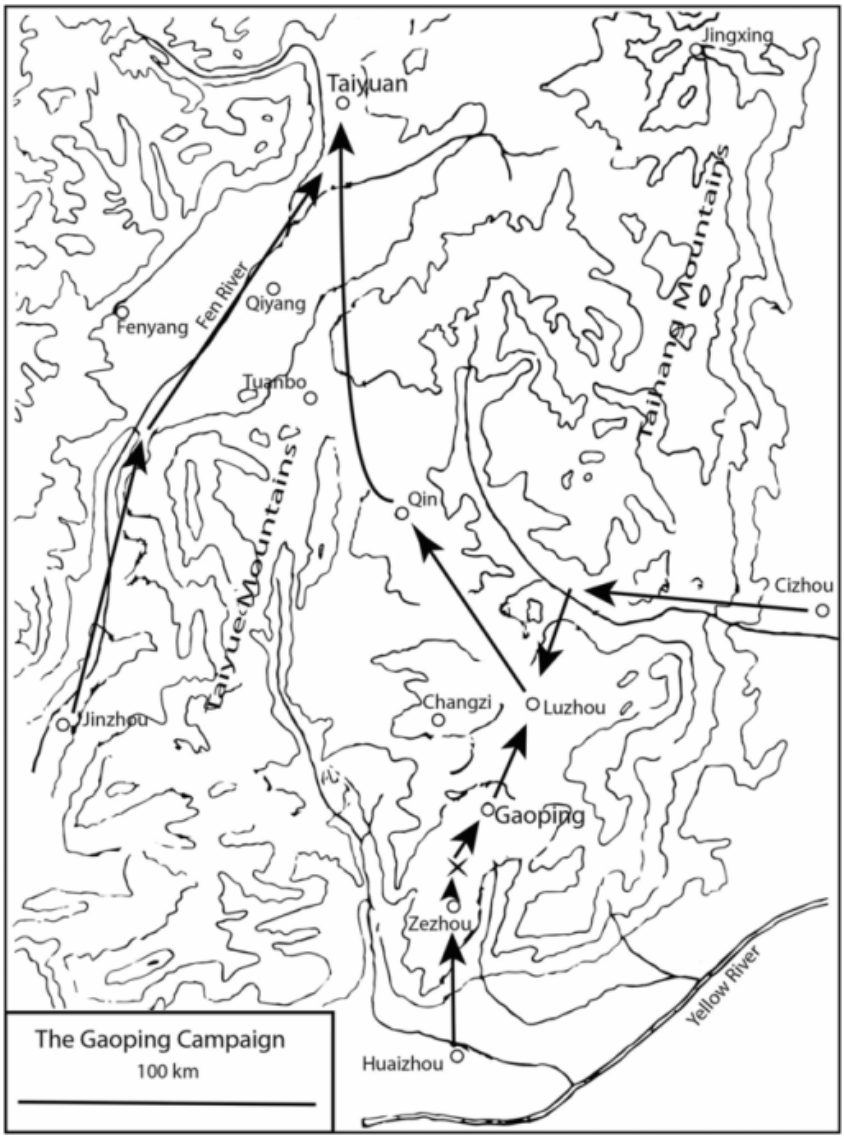
This gradual ceremonial movement of Shizong into the imperial position overlapped with the developing situation on the northern border. Indeed, just as Shizong was promoting court officials on 29 March as part of his new accession to power, the raid by the Northern Han vanguard distracted him and directed his attention to the border. Hence the objection of court officials to the new emperor's personal participation in repulsing the invasion was grounded as much, if not more, in their own expected loss of political power as it was in any "practical" consideration of dynastic stability (which also had implications for their own political power). Before the Northern Han invasion upset things, court officials had a very real opportunity to literally make Shizong emperor in a "legitimate" way, through a peaceful succession. Up until that point, he needed and was beholden to them for whatever political power he had as emperor. Once he shifted to a military track and established his own source of legitimacy outside of the efforts of court officials, however, his need for them and their influence diminished considerably. Of course, that shift then forced him to maintain a high level of military activity in order to

further substantiate his imperial power. For Shizong, this does not appear to have been a problem as military activity suited both his personality and the requirements of empire building.

If the loss of political power of the court officials was a clear possibility in advance of the Battle of Gaoping, Li Zhongjin's dramatic decline in influence came as a complete surprise. Li was one of the most powerful men in the Zhou empire, a nephew of the late Guo Wei, commander of the Imperial Guard, the largest and strongest part of the Zhou army, and one of the men forced to swear allegiance to Shizong by Guo Wei before his death. The particular way that the battle played out, the flight of many of Li's men and Shizong's personal participation, led directly to the replacement of Li's subordinates with Shizong's, and a balancing out of power between the Imperial Guard and the Palace Corps. The men promoted to control this new configuration of power were later responsible for the *coup d'etat* that founded the Song dynasty, despite their personal loyalty to Shizong while he was alive. This is why the details of the Battle of Gaoping are of such crucial significance to explaining the subsequent military and political events, and the eventual creation of the Song dynasty.

The Northern Han invasion (12 March – 24 April 954)[3]

When the news of Guo Wei's death reached Liu Chong, the Northern Han ruler determined to seize the opportunity to take control of north China. He immediately applied to the Liao emperor for aid and prepared personally to lead thirty thousand of his own troops south from his capital, Taiyuan. The Liao emperor dispatched a force of more than ten thousand cavalry under the command of Yang Gun to support Liu's invasion. The mobilization of the combined Northern Han–Liao army proceeded rapidly and on 12 March, only eighteen days after Guo Wei's death, a report reached the Zhou court that Liu Chong was approaching the Zhou border. The size of the invading force was still unknown and Shizong did not immediately mobilize the Zhou army. About a week later, a force under Li Yun, a border general, was ambushed and destroyed by the advancing Northern Han–Liao army, alerting Shizong to the seriousness of the threat.[4]



2. Zhou Shizong's Gaoping campaign

Shizong decided personally to lead the Zhou army out of the capital and meet the threat in the field. His officials protested, arguing that Liu Chong would soon retreat on his own and, since the emperor was newly enthroned, he should not lightly move from his capital.[5] Shizong overruled them, correctly seeing the fight for the throne as a personal duel, with north China going to the victor. Just as significant, but left unsaid, was his need to prove himself to his own generals. He

could hardly rely on men of uncertain loyalties to defend his throne. Waiting in Kaifeng would have proven his inability to rule, leaving him vulnerable to Liu Chong or internal challenges or, at best, beholden to the generals who successfully defended him. But perhaps beyond these rational considerations was Shizong's desire for battle. His personal aggressiveness neatly coincided with the need for bold action.

Political and military considerations still prevented Shizong from immediately launching his defensive expedition. The objections of his officials were reasonable and also demonstrated enough political uncertainty to warrant waiting until the last moment to leave the capital. Of most direct military concern was the route of the Northern Han–Liao army. Shizong had to make sure that he would not be outmaneuvered and cut off from his capital. When the van of the invading force crossed the border on 8 April, Shizong set his defense plan in motion. He ordered two forces, one from the northeast in Cizhou and one from the northwest in Jinzhou, to march north and converge on the rear of the Northern Han–Liao army. Given the poor state of his information and the distances involved, it seems most likely that he hoped these armies would threaten the invaders' communications with Taiyuan rather than actually expect them to participate in any coordinated battle plan. The main Zhou army, composed of several scattered forces, was then ordered to concentrate at Zezhou (present day Jincheng).

Shizong left the capital on 16 April, passing through Huaizhou on 21 April and reaching Zezhou two days later, camping to the northeast. Liu Chong, not realizing that the Zhou army was nearby, bypassed Luzhou without attacking it and continued south, camping to the south of Gaoping. Shizong received a report that troops had been seen five miles to the northeast. The next day, the Zhou vanguard happened upon part of the Han army and attacked it. The Han troops pulled back and, when the van of their army came up, arrayed for battle on a high plateau. Shizong was afraid that they

would evade him and he ordered his forces to advance quickly. He hoped that he would have enough time to assemble his entire army, but he was going to risk battle even if that was impossible. If the Northern Han army got past him, his position would have been extremely tenuous. Unlike Liu Chong, who could rely on his Liao allies, Shizong could not expect the support of anyone if he were outmaneuvered and cut off from his capital.[6]

The Battle of Gaoping (24 April 954)[7]

The Battle of Gaoping was an event of critical political importance for the Zhou in the near term and the Song in the long term. The specific actions of several of the leading commanders had dramatic consequences for them personally, their families, and the ruling regime, and it is therefore important to place them as precisely as possible on the battlefield. Liu Chong originally planned to array the center of his army at Bagongyuan with Zhang Yuanhui commanding the troops to the east, and Yang Gun and his Liao cavalry to the west. That order was changed, however, and Yang's cavalry was removed from the order of battle, because Liu's initial assessment of the Zhou army obviated the need for Liao assistance.[8] This would prove to be a fatal error.

Liu Ci had not yet arrived with the Zhou rearguard, leaving the Zhou army somewhat outnumbered on the battlefield. Despite his uncertain situation, Shizong was determined to bring on a decision. Having rushed to meet the enemy in the field, he had little choice once he had made contact but to stand and fight. He placed Bai Zhongzan and Li Zhongjin on his left, to the west, Fan Aineng and He Hui commanded the right, to the east, and Xiang Xun and Shi Yanchao commanded a picked cavalry in the center. Shizong took up a position close by to observe the battle from horseback, with Zhang Yongde to protect him. All of the troops in Shizong's immediate vicinity were, not surprisingly, units of the Palace Corps, who were loyal to him. Shizong's impetuous nature had served him well up to this point by bringing his enemy to bay far from the capital and in cutting himself off from the power of the court officials. It remained to be seen whether events would turn in his favor.

Zhang Yuanhui began the Han assault by leading one thousand cavalry against the Zhou right. The battle was joined but Fan Aineng and He Hui soon fled the field with their cavalry, precipitating the

near total collapse of the Zhou right wing. Fan and He's departure exposed the infantry behind them, a thousand of whom took off their armor, and surrendered to the Northern Han. Rather than press home his attack, Zhang Yuanhui rounded up these prisoners and took them back behind the Northern Han lines in order to get a reward from Liu Chong. This would prove a costly mistake, although Zhang might well have been leery of leaving such a large formation of enemy troops, even nominally surrendered ones, unsecured on the battlefield. Precious time was lost which allowed the position to be shored up. Seeing the danger his army was in, Shizong led his personal troops forward to battle. Zhao Kuangyin (the future Song Taizu) and Zhang Yongde led their units forward in support of Shizong and after some desperate fighting, they scattered the Northern Han troops, and began to roll up the line from the flank.[9]

Liu Chong sent Zhang Yuanhui back into the fray, presumably heading for Shizong's position. But Zhang was less fortunate in this encounter, and he was killed after his horse fell down. His death shattered the Northern Han army's already shaky morale, and fueled that of the surging Zhou army. Liu Chong fled the field with his army already reeling. At that point, Yang Gun decided to leave the battlefield without attempting to call up his own troops and render assistance.[10]

Fan Aineng and He Hui were meanwhile plundering the Zhou baggage wagons as they fled south at the head of several thousand cavalry. Back on the battlefield, Shizong tried to order his officers to stop pursuing the Han army, but they did not receive the order because the messengers were uncertain which officers had been killed. He was concerned that there was still a large Liao army in the area that could easily change his victory into a defeat. There were also large numbers of surrendered soldiers to secure. The situation was still fluid.

Fan Aineng and He Hui ran into Liu Ci, the commander of the rearguard, as he was coming up to join the Zhou forces. Fan and He

stopped their flight, while Liu continued on to the north. This was a particularly loyal and brave act on Liu's part, as Fan and He had no doubt told him that the battle was already lost. As it was getting dark, Liu Ci ran into Liu Chong and a force of about ten thousand that he had managed to gather together from the torrent of fleeing men. Liu Ci defeated the Northern Han army, which then fled all the way back to Gaoping, pursued by Later Zhou troops. Liu Chong deserted his army entirely and rode pell-mell back to his own territory.[11] Liu's departure and the fall of night brought an end to his attempt to overthrow Shizong and the Zhou dynasty. Shizong's gamble had paid off.

Aftermath and follow-up (3 May – 30 July 954)

There were two immediate consequences of the victory at Gaoping: Fan Aineng, He Hui, and seventy other top Imperial Guard commanders were executed,[12] and the Zhou army invaded the Northern Han.[13] The executions allowed Shizong to consolidate his position and secure control of the Guard by inserting his own men at the top. They also marked the beginning of the rise and expansion of the Palace Corps. Intended to balance the power of the Guard, Corps recruitment was entrusted to Zhao Kuangyin, who would use the Palace Corps, and the insertion of former Corps commanders into the leadership of the Guard, to overthrow the Zhou dynasty six years later. Zhao had been promoted to Provost Marshal of the Corps for his bravery at Gaoping.[14]

Politically, the Gaoping victory strongly reinforced Shizong's position as emperor without leaving him beholden to any court official. His resounding success in the face of determined and nearly unanimous political opposition undermined the positions of those critics. Their lack of faith in his ability to win, or poor judgment in military matters, severely damaged their credibility in the emperor's eyes. This was not to say that these officials were completely marginalized, only that they were now placed in the position of having to prove their worth to the emperor and compete with other men who had automatic credibility based upon their loyalty and military service. A reasonably secure emperor, as Shizong temporarily was, could select his officials for their effectiveness and reliability, rather than the credibility their presence lent him. For Shizong, the most important thing was to consolidate his own security and secure the political power shift his victory had just handed him.

Military reorganization

Shizong's complete victory at Gaoping legitimated his rule in the eyes of the military. His security was further enhanced by the execution of Fan Aineng, He Hui, and more than seventy other officers of the Imperial Guard who had fled the battle or surrendered. More than a thousand Zhou infantrymen who surrendered were also executed along with many of the captured Northern Han troops. Shizong's orders were merciless, requiring the execution of any officer who fled, down even to the company level.[15] It was this opportunity that laid the groundwork for the Song coup six years later. Zhao Kuangyin and his cohort of officers were catapulted up the ranks of the imperial army. At the same time, whatever network of relationships Li Zhongjin had built up with his immediate subordinates was negated. Zhao and his comrades only owed loyalty to Shizong, interposing themselves between Li and the rest of the army.

It might seem that Shizong was unwise to place his faith in Zhao and the other junior officers, but they remained loyal to him while he was alive. Nevertheless, the preparations for their coup were quite complete by 959. They were clearly ready to take over when the opportunity presented itself. The biggest loser in the long run, apart from Liu Chong, would turn out to be Li Zhongjin. By rank and relation to the Zhou imperial family (he was Guo Wei's nephew), he seemed well placed either to dominate the government of Shizong's infant son or take over himself after Shizong's death in 959. But he did not realize that his rank and position in the military hierarchy were insignificant without the kind of personal ties to his subordinates that made actual control over the troops possible. Real power was still measured in soldiers and, despite his position, he failed to create a corps of men loyal to him. In order to understand the dramatic shift in political and military power after Gaoping, and to clarify the reasons for that shift, the structure of the Zhou imperial army before the battle

is briefly outlined in the next section.

The Zhou imperial army

The army that Shizong inherited was the product of two centuries of chaotic development that began more or less with the collapse of the *fubing* system during the Tang. Zhang Qifan has laid out the details of those changes during the Five Dynasties period; here, we need only concern ourselves with the imperial army in 954.[16] The most powerful army was the Imperial Guard, divided into two brigades of cavalry (also known as the Dragon Victory) and two brigades of infantry (also known as Tiger Victory). Li Zhongjin was the highest-ranking officer, then holding the title Imperial Guard Cavalry and Infantry Provost Marshal. The Commander in Chief of the Cavalry, Fan Aineng, and the Commander in Chief of the Infantry, He Hui, commanded the Zhou right, which broke during the battle. This is all laid out in the following chart with the known commanders listed in brackets beneath the formation.

The Imperial Guard

Provost Marshal [Li Zhongjin]			
Commander in Chief of the Cavalry [Fan Aineng]	Commander in Chief of the Infantry [He Hui]		
Left Brigade [Li Qian]	Right Brigade [Tian Zhong]	Left Brigade [Executed?]	Right Brigade [Zhang Shun]

In addition to the Imperial Guard, which had outgrown its function as the personal guard of the emperor while succeeding by 954, in giving the central government an army stronger than any military governor, Shizong had a rudimentary new formation, the Palace Corps, to provide himself with some form of protection against the Guard's praetorian tendencies. It was the Palace Corps, headed by Zhang Yongde, which guarded Shizong during Gaoping, supported him in his moment of need, and brought him victory. The Corps was divided into six formations (a remnant of its origins in the Tang Dynasty's Six Armies) of uncertain size: the Detached Troops, the Detached Battalion, the Inner Palace Duty Soldiers, the Detached Capital Elite, the Iron Cavalry, and the Controlled Cranes. The command structure is laid out in the following chart with incumbent commanders underneath in brackets.

The Palace Corps

Commander in Chief [Zhang Yongde] Provost Marshal [Han Lingkun]					
Detached Troops [Li Jixun]	Inner Palace Uprights [Murong Yanzhao]	Iron Cavalry [?]	Detached Battalion [?]	Detached Capital Elite [?]	Controlled Cranes [?]

Not surprisingly, Shizong promoted the commanders of the Palace Corps units to the top command positions after the battle. Perhaps even more interesting though is that he promoted the highest commanders of the Guard who had presumably not fled, Li Qian, Tian Zhong, and Zhang Shun, out of the Guard and into Defense Commissionerships in various prefectures. They were replaced by men from the Corps, Li by Han Lingkun, Tian by Zhao Hongyin (Zhao Kuangyin's father), and Zhang by Zhao Ding. To complete the restaffing, Murong Yanzhao took over the vacancy in the left Tiger Victory brigade. So, while Shizong's mass execution of surrendered Zhou soldiers may indeed have been done to discourage that sort of behavior in the future, the pattern of officer transfer indicates that he trusted the men of the Corps much more than the incumbent generals of the Guard. The incumbent Guard commanders were sent out to the provinces and never heard from again (at least in the extant sources). Real power was now at the center, not in the provinces. This in itself was a significant development, as the reverse condition was the case more or less since the Anlushan Rebellion began in 755.

All of these men who had been in the Corps were now spread over the upper echelons of both formations, profoundly altering the relationship between the Corps and the Guard. Whereas before they had somewhat counterbalanced each other through separate command

structures with the smaller Corps' proximity to the emperor making up for the Guards' far larger force, command was now effectively unified within a single group of generals at the command level. Shizong further enhanced their force balance and diminished the power of the Guard by shifting the best troops from the Guard into the Corps and increasing the Corps' size. With the exception of Li Zhongjin, Zhang Yongde, and Han Tong, control of the imperial armies was now in the hands of one group of men, all of them personally loyal to Shizong. The positions of Commander in Chief of the Cavalry and Commander in Chief of the Infantry were temporarily left vacant, further proof that Shizong was actually getting rid of Li Qian, Tian Zhong, and Zhang Shun when he promoted them to regional commands. If he had wanted to retain them in the Guard and promote them, suitable positions were available. After the executions and promotions occasioned by Gaoping, the top ranks of the Imperial Guard were as follows:

The Imperial Guard

Provost Marshal [Li Zhongjin]			
Commander in Chief of the Cavalry [empty]	Commander in Chief of the Infantry [empty]		
Left Brigade [Han Lingkun]	Right Brigade [Zhao Hongyin]	Left Brigade [Murong Yanzhao]	Right Brigade [Zhao Ding]

Although Han Lingkun had been Provost Marshal of the Corps before, and Murong Yanzhao Commander in Chief of the Detached Troops, their transfers to Commanders in Chief of brigades in the Guard were promotions. The Guard was still the main imperial army at this time and its upper ranks had higher status than the Corps. By 954, the Commander in Chief of the Corps ranked the same as the Commander in Chief of the Cavalry and Commander in Chief of the Infantry in the Imperial Guard.[17] No overall cavalry or infantry commanders were immediately appointed, but this was only a temporary situation after the battle. Han was soon advanced to Commander in Chief of the Cavalry. It is unclear whether the new appointments were directed at curbing or elevating Li Zhongjin's power. Equally unclear is what role, if any, Li had in choosing his new subordinates. While it is certain in retrospect that they were not loyal to him, this may not have been obvious at the time. Li had in fact been the first Commander in Chief of the Palace Corps in 952, the earliest record of that position.[18] It is thus possible that Li might have expected some personal loyalty from his former subordinates. If so, he was badly mistaken.

Zhang Yongde's relationship to the future conspirators was fairly odd. As Commander in Chief of the Corps, he was the superior officer of almost all of the founding generals before Gaoping. He remained the commanding officer for many of them, including Zhao Kuangyin, even afterward. Indeed, it was Zhang who advanced Zhao's name after Gaoping as particularly worthy of promotion. And surely the success

of so many of his subordinates must have redounded to his credit, particularly in contrast to Li Zhongjin. Yet, although he was Guo Wei's son-in-law, Zhang switched loyalty to the new Song regime easily and served it faithfully into Zhenzong's reign. He was rewarded for his fidelity with enfeoffment as a duke during his lifetime. His fairly sure navigation of the political waters of the Zhou and then Song argue that he was simply uninterested in becoming emperor rather than that he was foolish or ignorant. He provided for himself by supporting his more ambitious subordinates.

Following his reorganization of the leadership of the imperial armies, Shizong began a drive to improve their quality through shedding old and weak soldiers and recruiting new ones into the Palace Corps. Once again, the effects were two-fold: creation of a better army and strengthening Shizong's position politically. This latter effect was brought about not only by inducting new soldiers loyal only to Shizong, but also by drawing part of the soldiers from the ranks of the best provincial armies. The Song would later institutionalize this policy as "Strengthening the Trunk and Weakening the Branches." Whatever its immediate effects, Taizu implemented a similar process of retiring old or weak soldiers again in the early Song.[19]

The intentions behind many of these military movements were political. A balance had to be established between internal stability and external striking power, but there was no systematic way to solve this. The gaps between policies and their execution, institutions and their actual functioning, and supposed versus true loyalties, made every high appointment its own special case. Loyalties or enmities between commanders had to be considered in building effective but politically safe armies. Sometimes, simmering hatreds broke out during campaigns, resulting in murder and vendetta. Shizong's need to create an effective, loyal striking force induced him to take the not unreasonable step of promoting his closest, proven generals to the highest levels of command. But once that was done, once these men

were given the opportunity to acquire the kind of prestige and real military power that successful command of the imperial armies conferred, they became less beholden to Shizong. As long as they continued to succeed, and to at least act loyal to him, he had to promote them further. Their relationship was two-way, loyalty and success had to be rewarded or else a superior forfeited any claim on his inferior's service. This would prove the undoing of the Zhou house. One of the reasons supposedly put forward by the soldiers for making Zhao Kuangyin emperor was that the young Zhou emperor could not recognize their service.

Many of the political motives for certain military actions must be interpolated from their beneficial effects. In the case of Shizong's force reductions, he stated that it was in order to improve the army's quality and relieve the burden on the people. Shizong estimated that fully half of the soldiers were unfit, much of the army being composed of men too old or too young to serve. In the same sentence, he brought up Gaoping, noting that these soldiers failed in the battle and it was only his intervention that saved the day. Previous dynasties were unable to reduce the numbers because they were afraid to harm "human feelings."[20] A more cynical reader would argue that previous emperors were too beholden to their top commanders to force them to reduce the number of troops. Shizong's ability to take a more firm hand with the army was a reflection of his political strength. His efforts to centralize military authority in the emperor's hands were the foundation of Song methods and institutions, a point made by Edmund Worthy.[21] But nowhere do we have a statement about the political problems of the dynasty, only its military ones. This was not because the political problems were any less important, but rather because many of those problems were subsumed under military problems. It would be even more accurate to say, however, that the political and military problems were inherently inseparable at that time because military power and military men lay at the heart of any political concern.

The attack on the Northern Han[22]

After his second loss, Liu Chong fled back to his capital, Taiyuan, and Yang Gun led his army north. Shizong ordered a large-scale incursion into Northern Han territory on 3 May, first sending the troops that had not participated in the battle at Gaoping. The Zhou invasion went unexpectedly well, with Zhou troops rapidly investing Taiyuan.[23] With the Northern Han field army shattered at Gaoping, the Zhou army was unopposed as it roamed through Northern Han territory up to the walls of its towns and cities. Despite the fact that no preparations had been made for an extended campaign possibly involving siege warfare, the initial success of this *chevauche* convinced Shizong to transform the entire military operation into a full-scale invasion aimed at destroying the Northern Han regime. In what would become characteristic fashion, Shizong's aggressiveness would cause him seriously to overreach his army's capabilities.

The Zhou military leadership was unanimously against widening and deepening the campaign because provisions for such an undertaking were entirely lacking.[24] It appears from Shizong's subsequent order to his army to stop plundering that the forces already involved were living off the land. This was a functional expedient for a raiding force, but could not sustain a large army conducting an extended siege. Just as he had done with his court officials, however, Shizong ignored his generals' advice and began preparations to intensify the campaign. First, he combined a variety of forces to create an army of several hundred thousand men, most of which must have been composed of porters and men drafted for digging, not fighting. Next, he ordered supplies and men sent from ten prefectures to supply the army. Finally, he ordered a stop to plundering by the Zhou army.[25] This last order was presumably aimed at not arousing the local population against the Zhou army or Zhou rule. How effective his order was is impossible to say, though if Song

Taizu's similar pronouncement to his soldiers before they invaded Sichuan in 964 is any measure (Chapter 6), its effects were almost nil.

The armies already in the field continued to report successes, and by the time Shizong reached Taiyuan on 6 June, the Zhou army had completely encircled the Northern Han capital's fourteen miles of walls, and captured five prefectural seats.[26] Shizong's arrival at Taiyuan to personally oversee the siege, compounded by his territorial gains, was a serious threat to the Northern Han, one that the Liao emperor could not ignore. After the loss at Gaoping, the fall of Taiyuan would have dramatically changed the situation in the Liao empire's southern border, directly threatening Liao power and influence not just in northern China, but throughout the rest of its steppe empire as well. Liao military strength and political resolve would have been directly impugned, and the Liao emperor's own fitness to rule called into question by such a loss. Not surprisingly then, Liao emperor Muzong responded quickly to the Zhou threat, sacking and imprisoning Yang Gun, and dispatching two forces of cavalry to support the Northern Han.

The Liao forces did not directly confront the Zhou forces investing Taiyuan, choosing instead to take a more concentric approach, threatening the flanks and edges of the area of Zhou control. The first force, several thousand cavalry strong, camped between Xinzhou and Daizhou on 7 June. The presence of this force interfered with Zhou efforts to consolidate their territorial gains and was an immediate threat to their operations. The Zhou responded quickly to try and drive out the Liao, but the mixed Zhou force of ten thousand cavalry and infantry, soon bolstered by another three thousand men, had to withdraw after sustaining extremely high casualties in a pyrrhic victory over the Liao. At a cost of some two thousand dead, the Liao effectively undermined Zhou attempts to extend control beyond the immediate environs of Taiyuan.

The Zhou setback in the field compounded Shizong's woes. His siege of Taiyuan had failed to achieve any results, and constant heavy

rain and sickness among the troops made it clear that the invasion would have to be abandoned. The situation was deteriorating rapidly, and Shizong left Taiyuan on 5 July. After the battle at Xinzhou and the heavy rains, it became impossible to supply the army. Shizong's generals had, in fact, been correct about the inadvisability of the invasion. This was in marked contrast to the earlier advice of his civil court officials, where contravening their objections had proven wildly successful at Gaoping. Shizong returned to the capital on 30 July 954, some three months after his victory at Gaoping, with his enthusiasm for aggressive military action undiminished by his experience at Taiyuan.

The Zhou strategy for reunification of China

Despite Shizong's failed siege of Taiyuan, his success at Gaoping had dramatically improved his position politically and opened his mind to the possibility of reunifying all of China.[27] His ongoing efforts to take firmer control over the army as a whole, and the Imperial Guard in particular, also allowed him to consider such a major military undertaking without too much fear that it would destabilize his rule. He asked officials to submit plans to accomplish this goal and, in April of 955, announced that Wang Pu's plan was the best.

The strategic debate has been traditionally construed as a choice between a north-first or south-first plan, and discussed in purely military terms outside of its political context. A north-first plan would place resolving the Northern Han–Liao–Sixteen Prefectures situation ahead of the conquest of the kingdoms south of the Huai River and in Sichuan. A south-first plan would do the opposite. Once the question of south-first or north-first had been decided, a precise plan to carry out the strategy would have to be created.

One of the reasons that historians have erroneously represented the strategic debate in this way was the ultimate failure of the Zhou or the Song to "recover" the Sixteen Prefectures. This failure continued to rankle the Song government until the fall of the entire north in 1127 overshadowed it (see Chapter 2). Indeed, it may not be too far wrong to say that the all-consuming desire to possess that small area of what Song statesmen considered "China proper," for want of a better term, and the hatred of the Liao that it engendered, motivated the policies which led to the loss of north China to the Jin. The Song allied themselves with the Jin in order to recover this territory. Due to the subsequent argument over the division of territory, the Jin invaded the Song and captured its capital Kaifeng.

It might seem as if our discussion has gotten far ahead of itself, but subsequent events profoundly affected the portrayal of the Zhou–

Song strategy in the sources. The south-first strategy proposed by Wang Pu and later, to Song Taizu, by Zhao Pu has been seen as the mistake that prevented the recovery of the Sixteen Prefectures. We have no record of the actual strategy debate or the losing proposals, but they would not be too difficult to guess. The strategy proposals that we do have tell us more about what Chinese historians from the eleventh century on, looking back on the events of the second half of the tenth century, thought than about what the people at the time thought.

Overall, the most significant aspect of this plan is that, while it delineated the strategic goal, creation of an empire, and the strategy for doing so, eliminating individual states one by one, it had almost no relationship whatsoever to the course of the Zhou or Song military campaigns. Its inclusion in *The Comprehensive Mirror* and *The Old History of the Five Dynasties* appears to have been a teleological effort to place some sort of directed framework over Zhou Shizong and Song Taizu's chaotic and opportunistic approaches to war-making. Alternatively, or perhaps concurrently, Wang Pu's memorial was preserved solely to mark the decision to create an empire by military means. In either case, Edmund Worthy's comment that "In spite of his praise of Wang's strategy, Zhou Shizong did not follow it to the letter" is incorrect and confuses the general strategy and strategic goal of the plan with the campaigns themselves.[28] The clearest expression of the unimportance of Wang's specific strategy was Shizong's nearly simultaneous decision to violate it by attacking the four northernmost prefectures of the kingdom of Shu. Although he then turned to the south to carry out an extensive campaign against the Southern Tang, Shizong's next (and final) campaign was directed against the Sixteen Prefectures, despite the fact that the Southern Tang, Shu, and all of the other southern kingdoms remained unconquered. Thus, while Wang Pu's plan was indeed a "south-first strategy", as Worthy and the majority of contemporary scholarship correctly points out, Zhou Shizong and Song Taizu did not follow that strategy. Both emperors

campaigned successfully because they maintained strategic flexibility in the pursuit of their goal.

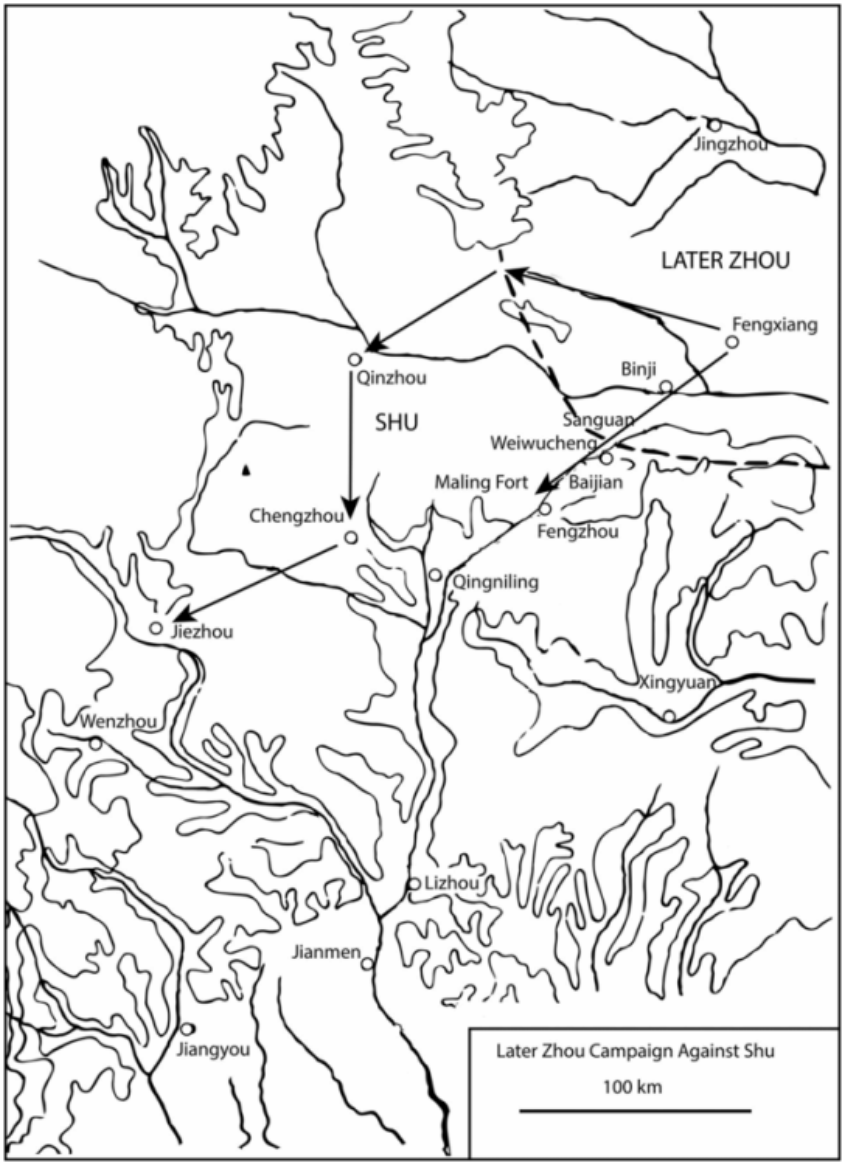
Despite the disjunction between Wang's blueprint and the conduct of the Zhou campaigns, several specific parts of his memorial are noteworthy. First, the loss of territory is connected to a loss of legitimacy for a dynasty. Conversely then, a legitimate dynasty, one that has the Way, should possess or be able to retake the territory in question. This then is the Zhou *casus belli* and the conception that would haunt the Northern Song in its failure to take the Sixteen Prefectures. Second, Wang correctly believed that neither the Northern Han nor the Southern Tang would launch major attacks against the Zhou during the period of "reconquest." Third, he regarded the Sixteen Prefectures as a piece of territory separate from the Liao empire, one that could offer its allegiance to the Zhou or be taken from the Liao as a limited objective. That is to say, the Liao would not regard an attack on the Sixteen Prefectures as a threat to their empire, only as a military venture whose objective was limited to a certain piece of territory. This last assumption was pure folly and vastly underestimated Liao strength and resolve, not to mention the economic value of the area to the Liao court. Fourth, Wang wisely mentions Gaoping. Shizong's victory at Gaoping was the touchstone of his legitimacy, and he mentioned it himself on at least one occasion in justifying military reform. As the emperor's greatest accomplishment to date, a wise official attempting to garner favor would surely mention it. This mention may even have been a subtle reminder that he had not opposed Shizong's desire to participate in that campaign, or an apology and admission of personal error for having done so. Fifth and finally, the memorial attempts to contextualize any future campaigns into a less exclusively military effort.

Preparations for a campaign against the Southern Tang must have begun, if they were not already under way, soon after Wang's plan was sanctioned. The other aspects of his plan, such as economizing government expenditures, either were not carried out, or were not

recorded. Almost to punctuate the inapplicability of Wang's plan, the next item in *The Comprehensive Mirror* states that "The emperor planned to take Qin and Feng," two of the four northernmost prefectures of the Shu kingdom in Sichuan.

The campaign against Shu (24 May – 30 December 955)[29]

Shizong's decision in March of 955 to capture Shu's four northern prefectures, Qinzhou, Chengzhou, Jiezhou, and Fengzhou, is somewhat perplexing. Although a "request" from the "people of Qinzhou" to become part of the Zhou was duly noted in (and possibly manufactured for) the record, this could not have been what prompted Shizong to dispatch his troops.[30] He had enough military concerns to preclude lightly sending any of his loyal troops far from Kaifeng. Indeed, despite the relatively small number of troops involved, thousands rather than tens of thousands, the campaign would eventually draw in some of the Zhou's most important generals, including Han Tong and Zhao Kuangyin, and take six months.



3. Zhou Shizong's Shu campaign

The fact that Shizong was forced to send important generals to the battlefield when the campaign bogged down may explain how things developed, and indicate a certain consistency with his earlier invasion of Northern Han territory. It seems most likely that Shizong launched the campaign expecting that it would be rapidly concluded with a minimal military commitment. Although we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that it was originally conceived of as a raid

that, like his raid on the Northern Han, progressed somewhat better than he had expected, this seems unlikely. A military action which initiated active hostilities with Shu, but did not push its forces back to defensive positions surrounding its core territory, would have merely opened up a significant new front requiring heavier long-term troop commitment. At the same time, Shizong clearly did not conceive of the campaign as a major effort since he did not personally take part in it, as he did with every other major military action of his reign.

Whatever Shizong's original intentions were, the campaign did serve several purposes, as well as highlighting once again the importance of winning what one had started. The campaign served three functions: first, it kept the strategic initiative in Zhou hands by continuing the outward, offensive efforts begun after the Battle of Gaoping; second, it maintained internal morale by occupying at least part of the army in a positive goal while the buildup to the larger Southern Tang campaign was under way; and third, the unexpectedness of the attack put all of the Zhou's neighboring states on the defensive, giving Shizong a measure of strategic surprise. He could now attack any number of targets, Shu, Northern Han, the Sixteen Prefectures, Southern Tang, and so on who, unless they could coordinate their armies against the Zhou, which they apparently could not, would be forced to present a strong front to the Zhou in order to keep it from attacking them next. This minor adventure therefore served a number of important functions of far greater value than the direct economic or military returns conquest of the territory would provide.

But the gains he made also highlighted the losses that Shizong could have suffered if it had failed. Once started, the necessity of winning the campaign, no matter how small or unimportant the original military or political objective was, became paramount. Military affairs were particularly significant for the power and position of an emperor of an emergent, expansionist dynasty. Minor military actions ramified for a ruler who depended on winning battles

for his legitimacy and political power. Given the nature of his position then, Shizong could not afford to lose a campaign. This in turn led his wars to take on a logic of their own when the initial successes were overtaken by various setbacks. In this respect, his minor campaign against Shu was a rehearsal for his major campaign against the Southern Tang that began later the same year, with unexpected problems forcing an increasingly desperate mobilization of resources to pull out a victory.

Although the Zhou did not invade until May of 955, the Shu ruler began defensive preparations as soon as he found out about Qinzhou's "request."[31] Shizong ordered his invasion of northern Shu territory about the same time that Wang Pu delivered his grand strategy for the conquest of China. Eight Shu forts were quickly overrun late in May, but the Zhou army fought inconclusively with Shu forces east of Weiwu City, northeast of Fengzhou, on 27 June.[32] Shortly after this encounter, the Shu ruler initiated contact with the Northern Han and the Southern Tang to see if they could act together to do something about the Zhou, although nothing seems to have come of this. While the Northern Han were probably in no position at that time to act against the Zhou, the Southern Tang's inaction is more surprising. The simplest explanation is that Shizong's intention to attack the Southern Tang was not apparent to the Southern Tang court at that time. The Southern Tang court would therefore have regarded the Zhou army's actions against Shu as only a minor event that presented them neither with an opportunity to disrupt future operations against their own territory nor as an event of any larger significance. For the Southern Tang court to have been unaware of Shizong's announced longer-term intentions, they would have had to have had a serious failure of political and military intelligence, which is possible, or to have assumed that the attack on Shu represented some kind of repudiation of the earlier Zhou court policy discussion. That is to say, the attack on Shu effectively masked Shizong's strategic goals. The later unpreparedness of Southern Tang border defenses when the Zhou did

invade at the end of the year does not clarify this and indeed, may argue that both conditions were true: their intelligence was lacking and the Southern Tang court did not believe the Zhou intended to attack them. Southern Tang overtures to the Liao when the Zhou attacked them were similarly unproductive. All of this points to a very significant lack of diplomatic coordination among the disparate kingdoms and empires of mid-tenth century China. There was no forum for mutual discussion of interstate relations, no established diplomatic links connecting courts, and no explicit general consensus among the various political actors to maintain some kind of status quo. This diplomatic gap allowed the Zhou and later the Song to conquer the southern and western Chinese kingdoms without taking significant diplomatic steps to prevent a coordinated military or political response to those actions.

By late July, the lack of military activity prompted the prime minister to suggest that Shizong recall the army. The Zhou army had not moved since their inconclusive battle at Weiwu city a month before, and logistic support was also proving to be difficult. Faced with the unpleasant prospect of having to withdraw having accomplished nothing, Shizong ordered Zhao Kuangyin, one his most trusted and competent generals, to investigate the situation. Zhao made his inspection tour and returned, concluding that Qinzhou and Fengzhou could be taken, and laying out a plan for doing so.[33] The Shu strategy had been to remain within their fortifications and refuse battle, a reasonable choice given that supply problems prevented the Zhou army from pressing its attack. This made the campaign, a war of attrition, which the Shu forces could well win by relying upon the supplies within their fortifications. For his part, Shizong could not afford a long campaign politically, particularly a losing one, and he may well have considered withdrawing. Most of his efforts were then being directed toward the buildup for the campaign against the Southern Tang; cutting his losses would have been better than losing military momentum by an outright failure just before his major effort.

Zhao Kuangyin's report must have concluded that, as difficult as the Zhou supply problems were, the Shu forts were in similar straits. As Shu supplies dwindled and the Zhou army remained in the field, the Shu army would have to shift to an active strategy of attacking the Zhou army directly. They had only to hold out until the Shu army was forced into the field. Shizong followed Zhao's recommendations and continued the campaign.

Even so, it was nearly a month before Shizong's renewed commitment to the campaign produced any results. The first battle of any significance since Weiwu City took place at the end of August, when the Zhou army defeated a Shu force, capturing or killing three hundred men.[34] Shu strategy was still effectively to wage a war of attrition, as their efforts were directed toward attacking Zhou supply lines. The Shu army was temporarily successful in mid September, but in interdicting the Zhou supply lines, the Shu army exposed itself to attack. A series of Zhou counterattacks in October crushed the Shu field army and convinced the Shu ruler to abandon the four prefectures and sue for peace in late November.[35]

The overall strategy and course of this invasion would be repeated in subsequent Zhou and Song campaigns, whether intentionally or not, and thus bears further consideration. While the sources for this campaign are silent on most of the details of the fighting, the outlines of what happened are revealing enough for us to draw some conclusions about it. Shu armies adopted or were forced to adopt a defensive strategy based on walled towns and forts. All they needed to do in order to win was not lose. The Zhou army was thus forced to take a series of fortifications. At the same time, the Zhou army had to keep itself supplied while denying the Shu forts the opportunity to be resupplied. It was probably the logistics problem that kept the overall numbers and, in particular, the concentrated numbers so small. Far more troops took part in the Battle of Gaoping, for example, than appear to have taken part in the Zhou campaign against Shu. If we assume that logistic support was quite limited, as it

seems to have been, then the manpower pool would have been similarly limited. Any concentration of men for a siege or a general action would be at the expense of some other objective. We must also remember that the Zhou army was storing supplies and preparing troops for the major campaign against the Southern Tang at the end of the year. The Shu campaign was not Shizong's major concern at that time.

Once the Shu had more or less ceded the field to the Zhou, their own time became limited by whatever supplies they had already stored up. This is not to say that the Zhou entirely cut off the Shu from resupply, but transport of provisions from Sichuan would have been even more difficult than from the Zhou territory. The Shu were betting that their stores could outlast the Zhou logistics system. They were not far wrong. Zhao Kuangyin's report must have argued both that the territory could be conquered and that it was worth the effort to do so. The renewed Zhou will and perhaps some additional supplies tilted the balance against the Shu. They realized that unless they did something, their provisions would not outlast the Zhou's. Logistics, rather than the strength of a town's walls, was the issue (it was the logistical limitations which prevented the Zhou army from concentrating enough men in one place for long enough to overcome most forts' defenses). A besieged town could not expect to hold out against an opponent who controlled the field and had adequate logistic support. The Shu forts closest to Zhou territory fell the fastest because they were at the end of the Shu supply lines and closest to the Zhou supply lines. In the early stages of the campaign, the Zhou army was able to concentrate its strength against individual Shu forts and overrun them. As the campaign progressed, however, concentration became harder and harder, and the Shu forts more and more dispersed. It was only when the Shu army became desperate enough to take the field as a result of their dwindling supplies that the Zhou army was able to decisively destroy Shu military strength in the area.

Judged by the size of the forces involved or the territory

conquered, this was not a major campaign. It was, however, significant in three regards. First, it provided a staging area for the later Song conquest of Shu, which would take only sixty-six days. Second, Shizong's unwillingness to treat diplomatically the Shu ruler as a fellow emperor clearly demonstrated that he was moving to overthrow the status quo. For the moment, this simply resulted in a breakdown of intercourt communications. If the Shu ruler could not communicate with the Zhou ruler as an equal, then there would be no official communications at all. The Zhou victory was simply not decisive enough to warrant a diplomatic or political capitulation. Third, the campaign demonstrated the limits of the Zhou army. Very few troops could be spared for a secondary theatre while maintaining border defense and preparing for a major campaign against the Southern Tang. This last point is extremely important. Limited or evenly balanced military means made skilled generalship, operational prowess, and tactical mastery decisive factors in the outcome of all of the Zhou and Song campaigns. Similarly, the demands of intensive campaigning required constant political attention in order that friction between commanders, between officials, or between officials and commanders, not diminish government stability and thus military striking power. This problem was less serious when active, successful campaigning provided ample rewards for the large number of ambitious men involved. Neither Shizong nor Song Taizu faced the political problems that Song Taizong did as the dynasty transitioned from intense, acquisitive campaigning to long-term defensive efforts. Even so, the absence of the much less well-established, gradual, bureaucratized pathways to power that would later temper ambitious men and create a more stable government demanded more personal, unsystematic political attention of the emperor.

Finally, diplomacy and the absence of a coordinated congress of states allowed the Zhou army to defeat its victims in detail. Even, or perhaps particularly, the Liao empire seemed disinclined to get involved in any sort of coordinated diplomatic effort to restrain Zhou

ambitions. Song Taizu would later actively engage in direct contacts with the Liao in order to secure his northern border through diplomacy, thus freeing his hand to act militarily elsewhere. But where Taizu was able to actually overrun and extinguish neighboring states, Shizong's results were less complete. Here the lack of a functioning intercourt diplomatic system became a great difficulty, leading to a military resolution without diplomatic sanction.

Battlefield results short of capturing or killing an enemy ruler or completely overrunning an entire kingdom were subject to interpretation and negotiation between courts. This interplay between changing military fortunes and changing political demands would be played out again in Shizong's campaign against the Southern Tang. A campaign with limited military objectives, the capture of a piece of enemy territory rather than the elimination of the enemy's regime, left a great deal of room for political haggling over such seemingly minor issues as the language used between courts in communication. But this struggle over language revealed the shifting relationship between political will and military means. Despite every battlefield defeat, every ruler clung to every shred of sovereignty until forced to give it up. In the case of Shu, Zhou military means were insufficient to reach a political resolution, causing a breakdown in communication. A similar problem would complicate Shizong's campaign against the Southern Tang.

[1] Sima Guang, Zizhi Tongjian [hereafter ZZTJ], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1992, 291.9500–01.

[2] Xue Juzheng, Jiu Wudaishi [hereafter JWDS], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995, 114.1511.

[3] For this campaign, see Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation of the Northern Song state," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996, pp. 76–81.

[4] ZZTJ 291.9502; JWDS 114.1511; Ouyang Xiu, Xin Wudaishi [hereafter XWDS], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995, 20.118.

[5] ZZTJ 291.9502–3; JWDS 114.1511. Peter Lorge, "Fighting Against Empire: Resistance to the Later Zhou and Song Conquest of China," in Debating War in Chinese History, edited by Peter Lorge, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 114–16.

[6] ZZTJ 291.9503–4.

[7] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation of the Northern Song State,” pp. 82–91.

[8] ZZTJ 291.9504.

[9] ZZTJ 291.9504–5; JWDS 114.1512–3; XWDS 12.118.

[10] ZZTJ 291.9505–6.

[11] ZZTJ 291.9506–7.

[12] ZZTJ 291.9507; JWDS 114.1514; XWDS 12.118.

[13] ZZTJ 291.9509; JWDS 114.1516.

[14] Edmund Worthy, “The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976, pp. 148–51, esp. p. 151. All titles are translated according to Charles O. Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.

[15] ZZTJ 291.9506–7, JWDS 114.1514, and XWDS 12.118.

[16] Zhang Qifan, Wudai Jinjun Chutan, Hangzhou: Jinan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993.

[17] Zhang Qifan, *Wudai Jinjun Chutan*, p. 33.

[18] Toqto’a, *Songshi*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 484.13975.

[19] Ma Duanlin, Wenxian Tongkao [Hereafter WXTK], Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991, 152.1325.

[20] WXTK 152.1325 and a similar comment in ZZTJ 292.9519.

[21] Worthy, pp. 2–3.

[22] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 91–4.

[23] ZZTJ 291.9508.

[24] ZZTJ 291.9509–10.

[25] ZZTJ 291.9510.

[26] ZZTJ 291.9513–14.

[27] ZZTJ 292.9524. Also Wang Qinruo et al., *Cefu Yuangui*, 104/29ab.

[28] Worthy, p. 17.

[29] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 99–103.

[30] ZZTJ 292.9524.

[31] ZZTJ 292.9524–5.

[32] ZZTJ 292.9528.

[33] ZZTJ 292.9529.

[34] ZZTJ 292.9529.

[35] ZZTJ 292.9530–3.

4

Rebuilding the empire

> Zhou Shizong observed the appearance of the various commanders and killed those with big ears.[1]

With the minor campaign against Shu completed, Zhou Shizong was now ready to attack the Southern Tang. This was the first real step toward conquering the southern kingdoms that had formed when the Tang dynasty collapsed, and it proved to be the true beginning of the consolidation of a new Chinese empire like that of the Han and Tang. But the empire for which Zhou Shizong laid the foundation would not be ruled by his descendants. During the course of the campaign, the loyal men he had inserted at the top of the military hierarchy continued to advance, and their power, prestige, and control over the army increased along with his. Li Zhongjin was similarly successful during the campaign, but because he lacked either a network of comrades or a sufficiently capable group of subordinates to advance with him, his gains were only personal. Although he remained tremendously powerful, he had lost a great deal of ground from the end of Zhou Taizu's reign, when he was the paramount general in the regime.

Li probably knew that he no longer enjoyed the total dominance that he had before, but it was not surprising that he did not recognize the nature of the threat to his power that had materialized. The group of comrades and sworn brothers which now populated the top of the imperial army ranks was something entirely new in the tenth century, if not in form, then in effect. Groups similar to it had existed before but proven ineffective. What was new was that this group was actually

functional. Li's model of power was more in keeping with Shizong's: a superior leading a group of loyal subordinates. Many of Li's subordinates had of course been eliminated after the Battle of Gaoping, but the model was still reasonable. Without Shizong's death in 959, his former subordinates might never have overthrown the Zhou. Usually, however, the power of the subordinates was controlled by their internal jockeying for power. What would emerge with the Song founding was the overwhelming political and military capabilities that a truly cooperative group could bring to bear.

The Song founders who emerged with Shizong's victory at Gaoping and subsequent successful campaign against the Southern Tang were also noteworthy because of how they had achieved their positions. None of them were regional warlords. All of them had advanced themselves by serving in the central government forces of the succession of northern Chinese regimes, or directly in the entourages of individual emperors. The latter route to high rank would remain important at least through the reign of Song Taizong. In itself, this was at least an indication that the military of the central government had become an attractive place for ambitious men. Considering the uncertain future that membership in the central government's army had held since 755, this was an important shift that indicated increasing stability in the central government apparatus, as distinct from the dynasty ruling it. The civil bureaucracy may well have achieved some effectiveness in administration within its narrow parameters of responsibility, but it was forced to become politically neutral, or at least extremely circumspect. The army was a more likely but dangerous route to power, and its officers were usually concerned with personal advancement rather than service to the ruling house. Shizong had temporarily overcome the problem of controlling the army by promoting men who had proved their loyalty to him. These men were not sent out to govern outlying territories for him, but kept at the center in control over the central army. Because Shizong felt that he did not need to place his most loyal men in

positions to control his territory, or perhaps could not place them there without upsetting the tenuous support of the men already in control of those places, he could actually create a striking force capable of expanding his territory.

The military–political balance required constant attention and operated along several axes. If the center was now militarily stronger than any of the individual warlords, it was still not stronger than all of them combined. While it was unlikely that a large enough alliance of them could be forged to topple Shizong, any attempt on his part to begin to reduce them individually by force might produce just that sort of coordinated resistance to his rule. The provincial warlords had previously counted on the central government's internal balancing forces, such as jockeying for power within the army, to limit the threat of military action against them. Shizong was now a threat to them, but he needed a legitimate excuse to attack any individual warlord if he was to avoid arousing all of them. All of these men were nominally loyal to the Zhou government, although in practice, they were politically independent to various degrees. If Shizong was going to capitalize on his military capabilities, he had to find a way to increase his political control over the territory of his empire. The method was conceptually simple, but practically difficult: he had to find a way, gradually, to encroach on the political prerogatives of the provincial warlords in such a way that they were forced to either concede or openly rebel. Yet the concessions required had to be small enough that most warlords would rather give in than risk rebellion and military reprisal. Too large a concession might convince a large enough number of warlords that resistance was worth the risk because resistance would be too widespread for the Zhou court to respond militarily. In that case, the court would be forced to back down, thus damaging its political credibility.

For the moment, the political calculus was too complicated for Shizong to reach for political consolidation of his territory. He either feared that his moment of military power had over-sensitized the

regional warlords to the possibility of political encroachment, or he was satisfied enough with his current political situation to aspire to the glory of recreating the Tang empire. It is also possible that the subtleties of his position entirely escaped him, as his actions frequently appear to have proceeded more from basic aggressiveness and egotism, which luckily turned out well, than from calculations of risk. In any case, the "public" discussion of plans to conquer the surrounding kingdoms would have allayed the fears of the other power-holders within his own territory that they were next on his list.

An outward campaign had other advantages as well, since soldiers and military supplies could be reasonably requisitioned from various provinces, thus weakening those warlords in the process of strengthening the central government. A successful addition of conquered territory would also place that area under the direct rule of the central government. With the central army present, any entrenched local leader would be placed at the mercy of the Zhou government. True obedience to the court could actually be put in place, thus increasing the financial and political resources of the regime. In this way, Shizong could avoid any of negative possibilities of military action within his territory while gaining all of the political advantages of his military power. He would become less dependent on the tenuous support of his own regional administrators and give them a chance to join in his enterprise. For all of these reasons, the Southern Tang was the best target for his first major attempt to make himself emperor through military action.

The Southern Tang was the largest and wealthiest of the southern states in the tenth century, and Shizong probably did not expect to destroy or completely conquer it in a single campaign. It was simply too large and powerful to be quickly or easily overcome, something which Wang Pu's strategy implicitly acknowledged when it proposed a two-stage process for conquering the Tang. In this respect, the campaign against the Tang was more similar to the Shu campaign than Shizong's invasion of the Northern Han after the battle of

Gaoping. The distinction is important, both in terms of military strategy and politics. Neither the Zhou nor the Song ever had any difficulty in reaching the Northern Han capital, yet the Northern Han was the very last kingdom the Song conquered. This was clearly due to the assistance of the Liao, who devoted considerable military resources to preserving their client, as well as to the absolute goal – the destruction of the Han regime – of the campaigns. It was precisely this lack of flexibility with regard to the Northern Han that hobbled military strategy. In contrast, Shizong's Southern Tang campaign displayed considerably more political flexibility, but only because he had not actually decided what his political goal with regard to the Tang court was beforehand. Without a specific political goal, only the most general of territorial goals, and no pre-existing diplomatic system for negotiating intercourt matters, military fortunes alone dictated not only Shizong's demands but also the pace of negotiations. Shizong's initial political demands were impractical, based on the erroneous assumption that his string of battlefield victories and the weakness of the Tang army demonstrated concomitant Tang political defeat and weakness.

But the Tang state did not collapse and its ruler did not capitulate. Despite repeated battlefield defeats, the Tang army remained in being and the Tang court remained a political force. The difficulties in bringing the campaign to a close placed the two goals of the invasion, one territorial and the other political, in sharp juxtaposition. The contours of the territorial settlement were easier to see, and thus negotiate, by simply examining the dispositions of the opposing armies. All parties concerned were quite clear on the military ramifications of the control of certain strategic locations. As long as Shouzhou held out against the Zhou army, for example, every Zhou gain south of the Huai River was unstable. The military means available to both sides also entered into the equation, subject, of course, to the usual misunderstandings caused by faulty administration and intelligence, but nonetheless, extremely significant

in framing the negotiations.

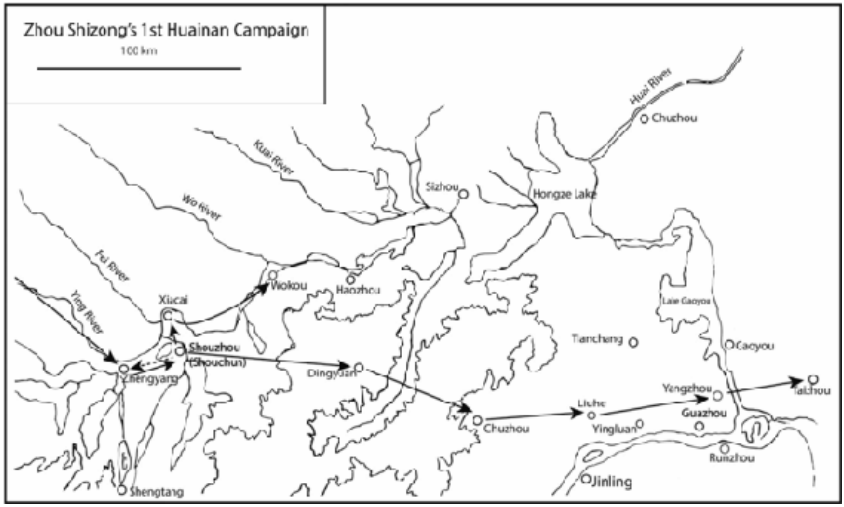
It is fairly clear that Shizong did not have fixed political goals in mind when he started the campaign, either assuming that any territorial gain would subsume a homologous political gain, or, as seems most likely, ignoring the issue entirely. Shizong's campaign against Shu had already demonstrated a wanton disregard for politics or diplomacy. Yet, while the complete breakdown of communications with the Shu court was not a great inconvenience, isolated and distant as it was, the Southern Tang was another matter entirely. Unlike the small campaign against Shu, the territory and armies involved in the campaign against the Southern Tang were enormous. As the campaign progressed, it was in the interests of both sides to bring it to some sort of conclusion, no matter how temporary. Both sides were enervated by the military struggle and desirous of a respite, but since there was no pre-existing diplomatic system for negotiations, some form of ad hoc means had to be cobbled together. At the same time, Shizong had to decide finally what he actually wanted out of a limited political settlement. What, short of total capitulation, was acceptable? The Southern Tang ruler faced similar questions. How much was he willing to concede politically, as opposed to territorially, for peace? Would he accept being addressed as something less than "emperor"?

Shizong's long-term political goal was to rule an empire like that of the Tang dynasty, and he assumed that a sufficiently strong military instrument would allow him to reach that goal. And while he understood that such an empire could only be formed by lengthy, sustained, successful military campaigns, he did not understand that military action, even when successful, did not obviate the need for political and diplomatic initiatives. Shizong's problem was not ignorance of the need for the political and administrative integration of conquered territory, the details of which really did not require his direct participation, or even the personal politics of the court and military, something he was very concerned with, but the critical nature of court-to-court negotiations on issues of mutual hostility. As

such, he had not formulated a set of limited, graduated political goals similar to his limited, graduated territorial goals. The territorial goals, to be fair, were mostly dictated by geography, and proceeded in well-understood, step-by-step relationships to the next piece of land. There was nothing equivalent in the political realm.

Given that Shizong was fairly successful by the end of the Huainan campaign in conquering a large piece of territory and obtaining political concessions from the Southern Tang court, one might reasonably argue that he was right to let the military situation take care of the political. But that approach resulted in a much longer and more costly campaign, which was ultimately forced to take cognizance of the political sphere to bring it to that successful close. There were two major shifts in Shizong's strategy during the campaign. His original strategy was a straightforward land-grab. The Zhou army would cross the Huai River and overrun as many cities and as much territory as possible. When the Huainan campaign bogged down before the determined resistance of the city of Shouzhou, Shizong actually withdrew from the field while he reconsidered his strategy. He returned to the fray with a new navy, and a new, two-pronged strategy: first, concentrate forces at Shouzhou to finally capture it and, second, seize control of the Huai River through combined land and naval operations. The successful execution of this strategy brought home to Shizong the possibilities of naval operations, and led him to his second change of strategy. Rather than focus on conquering the Huainan region prefecture by prefecture, Shizong put considerable effort and ingenuity into launching the Zhou navy on the Yangzi, thus directly threatening the Southern Tang capital and its remaining territory. That naval force convinced the Tang ruler to cede the remaining four unconquered prefectures to the Zhou without actually fighting a single engagement. The hollowness of its threat, however, was demonstrated by Shizong's rapid acceptance of the Tang's peace terms. After more than sixteen months of campaigning, the Zhou army was badly in need of rest and refitting.

Over the course of the campaign, Shizong had gained at least a limited appreciation of the importance of the political side of war between states and, connected to that, the need for a military strategy aimed at convincing the opposition to make concessions. He learned that he was fundamentally fighting to convince the Southern Tang ruler to give up, or at least give him something that he did not already control by conquest. In the end, he was able to convince the Tang ruler to give him four prefectures that he had not captured. This was an object lesson to the future Song Taizu, or, at least, he appears to have understood this in all of his campaigns. Conquest by purely military means was costly and time-consuming, and it tended to destroy much of the value of what you were trying to take. One's military and political means were always limited, and it was therefore always necessary to try to achieve one's goals in the most efficient way possible. A clever strategist is also able to navigate between political and military means in such a way as to use one to achieve goals for the other, or to make up for deficiencies in one by effective use of the other. A good example of this was Song Taizu's later use of diplomatic contacts with the Liao court to lessen the military threat on his northern border, freeing up military forces for use against other states. It is hard to say, however, whether Shizong had truly taken this lesson to heart, or whether he had merely become interested in the military possibilities of riverine naval forces. His death ended the subsequent campaign against the Liao before his strategy, or lack thereof, became apparent.



4. Zhou Shizong's first Huainan campaign

The Huainan campaign (January 956–April 957)[2]

The Zhou invasion of the Southern Tang in January of 956 initially achieved both strategic and tactical surprise. Given the extent of Zhou preparations, the Southern Tang court was remarkably inept in evaluating the Zhou threat, and in intelligence gathering. Indeed, until 955, the Southern Tang had regularly dispatched troops to guard the Huai River during the winter because the water level dropped, making the river fordable; in 955, the practice was stopped because it was deemed wasteful and unnecessary.[3] Just as the Zhou were planning to invade, then, the Southern Tang leadership was neglecting its defenses, a sign that they did not expect a Zhou attack that winter. The state of the Tang defenses was very important to Shizong, and he must have been aware of their change in policy. Whether his decision to start the invasion earlier than Wang Pu had proposed was prompted by this opportunity or whether it was his original intention is unclear.[4]

Shizong placed Li Gu in command of the invasion force on 17 December. The original plan imagined establishing a firm bridgehead in Southern Tang territory, followed by a conventional land offensive moving east along the prefectures on the south bank of the Huai River. This approach foundered on two problems: first, the bridgehead into Tang territory could not be secured until Shouzhou was captured, an objective which ultimately took fifteen months; and second, without a naval force to control, or at least contest, the Huai River, the Tang navy could freely threaten the Zhou pontoon bridge connecting it to its home base, and resupply Tang bases along the river.

The Southern Tang court heard about the mobilization at the beginning of January and, realizing that Shouzhou was one of the initial Zhou objectives, sent twenty thousand troops to Shouzhou and

thirty thousand to Dingyuan. Before those troops could arrive, however, Li Gu and his army crossed the Huai River using a pontoon bridge at the Zhengyang ford, west of Shouzhou and above it on the Huai River. Li immediately invested Shouzhou while his subordinates won several small battles in the surrounding countryside starting in late January and continuing into mid-February, when Shizong decided to take the field himself.[5] Just as Shizong was leaving Kaifeng, however, the twenty thousand strong Southern Tang relief force approached Shouzhou, accompanied by several hundred ships heading for the pontoon bridge at Zhengyang. Threatened both in the field and in his communications with Zhou territory, and with Shizong already on the road, Li Gu chose to fall back to Zhengyang and defend the pontoon bridge. Shizong was en route when he heard that Li was falling back, but his order not to abandon the siege of Shouzhou arrived too late to prevent the withdrawal.

Upon hearing that the Zhou army was withdrawing, the Southern Tang relief force recklessly pursued it, losing all order and becoming spread out over a hundred miles along the road. Although he had been unable to prevent Li Gu from retreating, Shizong realized that he could take advantage of Li's retreat by attacking the disorderly Southern Tang relief army. A Zhou army under Li Zhongjin force-marched to Zhengyang, crossed the pontoon bridge, and shattered the Southern Tang army in the first clash. The Tang commander was beheaded and most of the officers captured alive, while the Zhou advance left a trail of between ten and twenty thousand Tang dead spread over ten miles. When Shizong reached Zhengyang on 5 March, he demoted Li Gu, and replaced him as overall commander with Li Zhongjin.[6]

Shizong took up position near Shouzhou on 7 March, and drafted several hundred thousand men from the surrounding prefectures to besiege the city. He then addressed the vulnerability of the pontoon bridge by having it moved nineteen miles west and downstream to Xiacaizhen, in Ying prefecture, and dispatching a force under Zhao

Kuangyin to attack the Tang troops tied up with their ships on the Huai River, camped below Tushan. Zhao lured the Tang force into an ambush and crushed it, capturing fifty warships. These warships were the first of many captured by the Zhou in the course of defending the pontoon bridge, and, along with their crews, would later be transformed into the beginnings of the Zhou riverine navy.[7]

Hearing that Shizong was actually in their territory, the Southern Tang court sent two generals to raise an army of a hundred thousand troops at Chuzhou to relieve Shouzhou. Shizong received intelligence concerning this relief army, and in mid-March ordered Zhao Kuangyin to force-march several thousand troops to Chuzhou and break up the mobilization. Zhao's rapid march caught the Southern Tang army unprepared and he routed it in an initial encounter. The Zhou army hotly pursued the Tang army back through the pass to the gates of Chuzhou. Zhao then used a mountain trail, revealed to him by a local guide, to send troops around to an undefended gate at night. These troops broke into the city, driving the Tang troops out of the city where Zhao's main force defeated them.[8]

These initial Zhou victories prompted the Southern Tang ruler to send a letter to Shizong asking him to stop his invasion. The letter, addressed to the "Emperor of Great Zhou" from the "Tang Emperor", elicited no response from Shizong.[9] This initial diplomatic gambit was an attempt both to establish communications, which clearly had not existed before, and to feel out Shizong. The Zhou emperor was very much an unknown quantity, having been on his throne slightly more than two years when he invaded the Southern Tang. Without a previous understanding of Shizong's intentions, his sudden massive military action must have been profoundly shocking. Shizong's military actions to date had been to repulse a Northern Han invasion, followed by a counter-invasion, which failed, and a minor successful, if unimpressive, annexation of a small piece of Shu territory. As such, his military record up until that point was not particularly threatening to the status quo.

The Tang emperor may well have thought that the current Zhou display of force was a play for some sort of minor political or territorial gain. Shizong's goals were much grander than the Tang ruler could have imagined, as were his military means. Shizong, for his part, was blind to the possibilities of negotiating a territorial concession, like the surrender of Shouzhou, which could have advanced his long-term goal with minimum effort and vastly improved his position in future campaigns. This was partly due to his impatient, ambitious nature, and partly due to his underestimation of the Southern Tang's military potential, particularly that of Shouzhou. There was therefore no reason, from Shizong's perspective, to respond at that early stage to Tang diplomatic overtures.

The siege of Shouzhou continued apace. The moat's dike was broken on 29 March to drain the water into the Fei River. At the beginning of April, a second Southern Tang peace mission arrived with gifts, money, hundreds of head of cattle, and forty thousand gallons of wine to entertain the troops. The Zhou emperor was now prepared to at least entertain these ambassadors, and after putting on a display of his soldiers for them, demanded that the Tang ruler capitulate to him peacefully or else he would conquer the kingdom by force of arms. The frightened ambassadors were stunned into silence by Shizong's sweeping ambitions. Such a radical denial of the status quo was shocking even, if not particularly, as the opening position of a negotiation, since it would be an embarrassing position to back down from in the future. Shizong may have hoped to simply bluff the Tang into conceding well ahead of him demonstrating the ability to conquer such a massive territory. But it was not entirely a bluff for Shizong, since, despite his quite tenuous military situation at that time, he fully intended to conquer the Southern Tang by force of arms unless it gave in to him. The envoys, wholly unprepared for this sort of response, departed with Shizong's message.[10]

Throughout April, Zhou forces continued to capture Southern Tang forts, and county and prefectural seats. With the Zhou military

situation apparently improving, and a Southern Tang emissary to the Liao asking for help against the Zhou just captured by the Zhou, the Southern Tang ruler sent a third peace delegation to Shizong, accepting that the Zhou emperor held Heaven's Mandate and asking to become a vassal ruler in Zhou service. The envoys then presented further gifts of money and silk. Shizong accepted the gifts but did not alter his campaign plans. A Tang envoy remained in the Zhou camp this time, however, keeping the channel for diplomatic communication open.[11]

This third contact, led by two fairly high-ranking officials, had clearly responded to Shizong's grand imperial pretensions, offering a formal limited political submission in return for the end of military activity. Although Shizong had no immediate response to this offer, he probably felt it was premature, he did not now dismiss the possibility of negotiating some sort of settlement. What kind of settlement he envisioned is less clear. Having already won a limited political concession that affirmed that he held Heaven's Mandate, he might well have imagined that he would be able to force the Southern Tang ruler step by step to yield not just political, but also territorial, concessions, even to the extent of complete capitulation.

Despite the resistance of Shouzhou, Shizong felt his military situation after about four months in the field was quite good. His troops had been mostly victorious, he fully expected Shouzhou to fall shortly, and the Southern Tang ruler was offering terms. But he did not understand the function of Sun Sheng, the Southern Tang emissary, as the representative of the opposing side in a negotiation framed by military and political concerns. Sun was not in the Zhou camp to serve Shizong's interests, as he found out when, at the end of April, he sent Sun to convince Liu Renzhan, the defending general of Shouzhou, to surrender. Instead, Sun told Liu that he should not surrender. Shizong was furious when he heard what Sun had done, but Sun pointed out that as a senior Tang official, he could not tell a junior official to betray the Tang.[12] Shizong relented in the face of this

perfectly reasonable and admirable expression of loyalty, but it did not speak well of his political acumen. Fortunately for him, his army's strength was more than enough to intimidate the Southern Tang court.

The Tang ruler sent Li Deming, one of the leaders of the second peace mission, back to Shizong with a new offer, this one including territorial concessions. In addition to doing away with his own title of emperor, the Tang ruler offered to cede the Huainan region (comprising the six prefectures of Shou, Hao, Si, Chu, Guang, and Hai, all situated along the south side of the Huai River) to the Zhou and pay an annual indemnity of one million units of gold and silk if Shizong would halt military operations.[13] This was a much more generous offer, one which Shizong would have been well advised to accept. At no further cost, he could have captured Shouzhou, along with a large section of territory which he did not really control, and have placed himself in a very strong position for future campaigns against the Tang. Indeed, it would have been worth accepting the offer simply to successfully resolve the siege of Shouzhou.

Shizong, however, believed that he already held half of the land in the Huainan region, so, with his generals reporting more victories every day, he wanted not just what was within his grasp, but what was beyond it. This, at least, was the position he presented to the Tang delegation. There was some truth to it, but it was in equal parts, a bluff. Shizong knew that his position before Shouzhou was not progressing and that he had been away from his capital too long. A more cautious or strategically savvy man would have taken the offer, declared victory, and returned to Kaifeng in triumph. Shizong chose to gamble instead, hoping that a strongly worded ultimatum would net him a return far grander than his military situation warranted. Either through his confidence or sheer intimidation, he convinced the Tang delegation to return and get the Southern Tang ruler to add the Jiangbei region (those prefectures north of the Yangzi and south of the Huainan region) to the offer. Li Deming was clearly impressed by the strength of the Zhou army.

With Shizong's leave, the new Tang ambassadors returned to Jinling, this time accompanied by Shizong's own envoy, bearing an ultimatum to the Southern Tang ruler for complete surrender. The Zhou envoy also carried individual letters to the Tang ministers and generals urging them to personally surrender. For his part, Li Deming described the strength of the Zhou forces to the Tang ruler and suggested that he also cede the Jiangbei region to the Zhou. Another minister disagreed and argued that, to the contrary, they should not cede more territory to the Zhou. Li responded at length concerning the military situation, but was not convincing. There were good reasons for this, however, as subsequent events would show that the Zhou army was not quite the overwhelming force Li believed it to be. His position was also unwise, as he had already alienated the Tang ruler. When Li was impeached, accused of selling out the country for profit, the infuriated Tang emperor ordered him beheaded.[14] For the moment, then, Shizong's gamble had failed. Anxious as it was, the Tang court was not yet so frightened that it was willing to give in to the Zhou emperor's demands. And the Tang army was soon to win a few victories to bolster its court's resolve.

The first Tang victory came not against the Zhou army, but against an army from Wuyue, in the south, who were acting in concert with the Zhou. A hastily cobbled together Tang force annihilated the Wuyue army as it besieged Changzhou, beheading more than ten thousand men. The victorious Tang force then marched north toward Shouzhou, driving the Zhou out of Taizhou on 14 May, and continuing on toward Yangzhou. The Tang army encamped at Shugang to the west of the city, where its position on the heights threatened the Zhou force's line of retreat. The Zhou force controlling Yangzhou was forced to withdraw.[15] In short order, the Zhou army had been driven out of two prefectural seats without actually engaging in battle, demonstrating the extremely tenuous hold that Zhou forces had on the area. The mere presence of an organized Tang force nearby was a greater cause for concern than one pinned down attempting to lay

siege to a prefectural seat. A concentrated enemy could be attacked and defeated, but a force that merely threatened could wreak havoc. Since Yangzhou, for example, had been burned before it was captured, an occupying army would have to spend a great deal of time and effort foraging to supply itself. It would also have few stores to enable it to withstand a siege.

These Tang advances came at a bad time for Shizong. Even as he had been gambling diplomatically, he had been well aware that he would soon have to return to Kaifeng. It was bad enough that he would do so after personally directing a thus far failed nearly three month siege of Shouzhou, but he could not add to that a crumbling military situation. It suddenly became very important for him to recover the semblance of momentum as cover for his personal withdrawal. Zhang Yongde was quickly dispatched to re-establish the Zhou position at Yangzhou, allowing the army to return and reenter the city, and a second force under Zhao Kuangyin was sent to Liuhe, forty-four miles northwest of Yangzhou, a position which would allow him to cut off the Tang lines of communication. Even having retaken Yangzhou and bolstered the Zhou position there, the siege of Shouzhou was not progressing. Heavy rains had left several feet of water in the Zhou camps, and with supplies running low and casualties heavy, Shizong must have realized that he had lost his gamble.[16] The late Li Deming had not, of course, returned, and time was running out for Shizong to cut himself loose from the deeply mired siege. In mid-May, less than three weeks after sending his ultimatum to the Tang court, he declared Shouzhou all but fallen and departed. The siege and campaign continued, however, as they would for nearly another year.

The contest now focused on control of Yangzhou. In late May, the Zhou won two victories, the first, a small one, and the second, a crushing one. Zhao Kuangyin, with two thousand men, attacked a twenty thousand man strong Tang army, killing or capturing five thousand, and driving the shattered remnants of the rest back across

the Yangzi. The battle also destroyed the last of the veteran Tang soldiers. When the Tang ruler heard that Yangzhou had again fallen, he ordered neighboring regions to send troops to retake it. The Zhou army defeated two separate Tang armies of ten thousand men, firming up control over Yangzhou.[17]

Shizong was inspecting the new pontoon bridge across the Huai River at Wokou as the struggle for Yangzhou intensified. He was less interested in the bridge than in the battles around Yangzhou, and his ministers were forced to dissuade him from going there to take part. The Zhou emperor had been away from his capital too long, and he and his court were well aware that their military situation was increasingly tenuous. Indeed, shortly before he left for Kaifeng in mid-June, a Zhou force was defeated at Nantai River with more than a thousand men captured or killed. Shizong reached Kaifeng in early July to stabilize the political situation in his capital just as the military situation in the field was breaking down. At least in this initial phase of the campaign, his political gamble had failed, leaving him to play for time while the military situation turned back in his favor. Just as he had at Gaoping, Shizong relied on military success to recover his political fortunes.

Late in July, Southern Tang forces began to turn the tide back in their own favor. Liu Renshan made a sally from Shouzhou on 21 July and attacked the Zhou army camp south of the city. Liu caught the Zhou troops unprepared and killed several hundred of them, as well as burning their weapons.[18] This successful sally helped to convince the Tang ruler that he could resist Zhou incursions, and he ordered more troops sent to the area. In short order, these Tang forces retook three prefectural seats. The local population also began to resist the Zhou army. As the campaign dragged on, the presence of the Zhou army had made life difficult and people formed “White Armor Armies” of civilians wearing paper armor. These armies were actually able to defeat Zhou troops on several occasions and were responsible for much of the Tang success in recovering land.[19] No large Zhou units

were beaten, but these armies of civilians were able to drive off smaller units and thus impede Zhou efforts to control the territory around major strategic points.

Southern Tang relief forces now began to encroach on the area south of Shouzhou, camping at Zijin Mountain, and communicating with the city by signal fires. On the Zhou side, Xiang Xun sent a memorial requesting that the troops of Huangling join with the other troops for a concentrated attack on Shouzhou. This was effectively a repudiation of Shizong's strategy up to this point, but the deteriorating situation clearly warranted it. Shizong had badly underestimated the Southern Tang military, overextended his own forces, and endangered the entire campaign by not first capturing Shouzhou before proceeding. Yangzhou and Chuzhou were abandoned, and those troops also concentrated on Shouzhou.[20]

Although many of the Tang commanders wanted directly to attack the Zhou army besieging Shouzhou, the overall commander, Song Qiqiu, ordered them to adopt a defensive stance and not go out to fight. A second Tang force of fifty thousand troops under Jing Da marched to Haozhou to support, at least morally, the troops attempting to relieve Shouzhou. The defensive stance did not sit well with many of the generals, but Song Qiqiu understood that, while a decisive defeat of the Zhou army would have been ideal, it was a risky strategy. Indeed, the Zhou had won almost every open engagement against the Tang army, so the prospects of success following that course were low. A gradual approach, surrounding the Zhou army, would force it to depend upon supplies brought across the pontoon bridge at Xiacai, and put tremendous logistical pressure on the already straightened Zhou forces. Diplomatic contact ceased in the face of this rising Tang military tide and the collapse of the Zhou invasion back onto Shouzhou.

The critical importance of the pontoon bridge was underscored by the posting of Zhang Yongde, one of the highest-ranking Zhou generals, at Xiacaizhen on 15 September to reinforce its defenses. A

Tang flotilla sent to rescue Shouzhou attempted to attack the bridge with fire ships, but the wind changed direction and it was forced to withdraw. Zhang then had an iron cable more than a thousand feet long strung across the river about fifty feet from the bridge to keep Tang ships from getting too close. In late November, he defeated another Tang fleet at Xiacai. This time, when the Tang returned to attack the bridge, Zhang ordered good swimmers to dive beneath the Tang ships at night and anchor them to the river bottom with iron chains. Once the ships could neither advance nor retreat, he let his soldiers attack them at will, killing a great number of men and sinking many ships.[21]

Even in the midst of the ongoing campaign, Shizong's struggle for control over the army continued. He promoted Zhao Kuangyin to Palace Corps Commander in Chief on 30 November, temporarily replacing Zhang Yongde, who had earlier replaced Li Zhongjin. Zhao took the opportunity of his promotion to recommend his own retainer and advisor Zhao Pu for promotion as well, though this was not within the military hierarchy. Zhao Kuangyin's promotion may have brought to head a simmering dispute between Zhang Yongde and Li Zhongjin, the two men who between them commanded most of the Zhou military (as well as both being son-in-laws of the first Zhou emperor, Guo Wei). Zhang had secretly warned the emperor that Li was disloyal, but Shizong did not believe it. Li took it upon himself to ride alone into Zhang's camp at Xiacai one day and work out their differences face to face. He was able to alleviate Zhang's concerns, much to everyone's relief. This split had actually reached the ears of the Tang emperor, who sent Li a secret message offering him great rewards for turning against the Zhou. Li forwarded the message to the Zhou court, with profound consequences for the Tang envoy Sun Sheng.[22]

The Tang envoy Sun Sheng had followed Shizong to Kaifeng, and the Zhou emperor treated him very generously, giving him audiences after he held court, drinking with him and asking about Tang affairs.

Sun asserted that “The Tang ruler fears Your Majesty’s divine might, he serves Your majesty without other thoughts.”[23] Sun was in an extremely difficult position, caught between his own court and Shizong. As we have seen, and as Sun was acutely aware, when Li Deming had returned to the Tang court and spoken of the Zhou army’s power, it left him open to impeachment and execution. Li Deming had been specifically accused of selling out the Tang state for personal advantage,[24] something that Shizong actively encouraged when he sent letters not only to the Tang ruler, but also to all of the ruler’s top officials. An envoy at the Zhou court would naturally fall under even greater suspicion of Zhou influence. Envoys were also suspected of being spies, which they naturally were, as well as being men at one court who were loyal to another, which they also were. There was always a question of where a given envoy’s loyalties lay. Sun’s position became untenable when Li Zhongjin sent along the secret message he had received from the Tang emperor offering him rewards for betraying the Zhou.

The military and political positions Sun took in discussions with Shizong were designed to limit the scope of the negotiations, and foreclose in advance the possibility of his ruler surrendering the entire kingdom to the Zhou. Under the framework Sun was attempting to establish, the only issues that could be discussed were territorial concessions within the Huainan–Jiangbei region, and political concessions concerning formal intercourt protocols. In effect, Sun was saying that, since we all know you cannot conquer the kingdom militarily, you should accept the limited political and territorial concessions that we are offering. The danger of this position was that the value of the political concessions was predicated upon a certain measure of credibility on the part of the Tang. The concessions were worthless without that credibility, and therefore could not be substituted for territorial concessions. The Tang ruler’s secret message to Li Zhongjin completely undermined his credibility, making it clear both that he did not, in good faith, actually accept the “submission”

he was offering, and that he would actively work to politically undermine the Zhou state by exploiting any internal schisms. Shizong was exquisitely sensitive to the latter concern, since it went directly to the heart of his rule.

A furious Shizong summoned Sun and demanded an explanation for his false presentations. Sun calmly denied that he had been false, and requested that he simply be killed. Asked for military information, he did not respond. Through no fault of his own, Sun had been placed in an impossible situation. Shizong had him placed in detention, while Cao Han attempted to cajole some useful information from him. When this failed, Sun, together with more than a hundred members of his delegation, were executed. Before his execution, Sun bowed to the south, the direction of his ruler, and said: "Your servant respectfully requites the kingdom by dying."[25]

The execution of Sun Sheng and his delegation encapsulates the relationship between war and politics. A fluid military situation creates a fluid political and diplomatic situation. The main protagonists move toward a more stable relationship through the rapidly shifting changes on the battlefield, trying to obtain or retain as much political and military power as possible through political negotiation based on victories, losses, and their expectations of future victories and losses. These main protagonists are themselves using and subject to the shifting personal loyalties of generals and officials making similar calculations of both their personal and political advantage. Further complicating this mix is the cultural values that valorize or excoriate certain behavior. Under certain circumstances, the only "good" option was to stay resolutely loyal to one's ruler and accept death. Less clear is the position of the rest of Sun Sheng's delegation, men who were simply swept up in events outside their control.

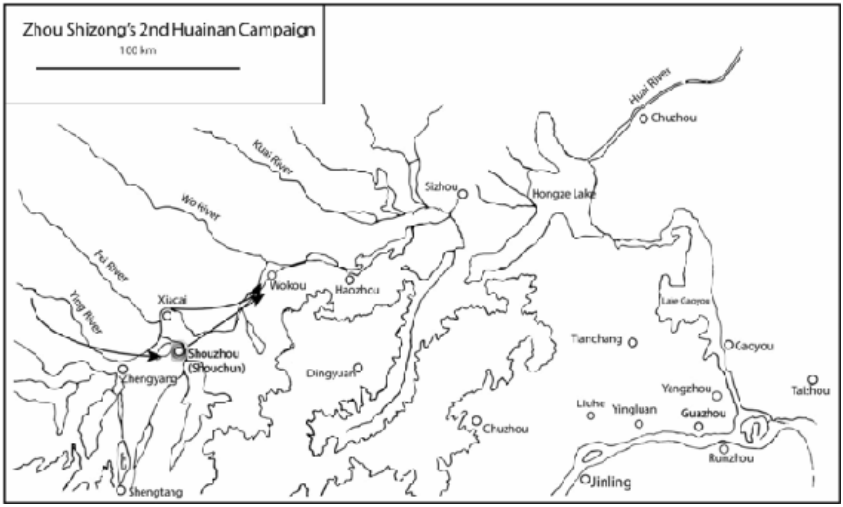
The Tang also tried to obtain aid from the Liao, but they were unwilling to intervene militarily or diplomatically. Given the previous military clashes between the Zhou and Liao, the Liao forbearance is

noteworthy. Indeed, as we shall see, there would be no major Liao incursions into Zhou or Song territory until after Song Taizong's failed invasion of Liao territory in 979. Their inaction strongly argues that it was not Liao policy to prevent the formation of a large, consolidated Chinese empire to their south. Given that the Zhou position in 957 was quite precarious, the Southern Tang had a long-standing tribute relationship with the Liao court, and Zhou and Liao troops had fought several times in the past, it would have been quite reasonable, and very easy, for the Liao to have foiled Shizong's campaign with a military demonstration on the northern border. Liao emperor Muzong and his court's decision not to do so was in many respects a short-sighted policy, since Shizong would invade Liao territory in 959, and the Song would cause them problems for more than two decades, between 979 and 1005. But the consistency with which the Liao court would fight for, and hold to, peaceful diplomatic relations with its southern neighbor after being driven out of northern China in 947 strongly suggests that this was a fundamental part of its military and diplomatic policy.

Li Zhongjin, for all his dutiful and loyal presentation of the Tang ruler's secret letter, got to see his rival Zhang Yongde promoted to the new, prestigious position of Supreme Commander of the Palace Corps.[26] This did not fundamentally change the disposition of command authority in the Zhou army, Zhang was still in charge of the Palace Corps and Li was still in charge of the Imperial Guard, but Zhang's new rank elevated him above Li. Li's sub-commanders in the Imperial Guard were also Shizong's retainers, which served to loosen Li's control over the central government troops not directly under his command. He was slowly and surely being pushed out of power, even though he still retained a fair measure of Shizong's confidence. A more basic concern for dynastic stability had prompted the Grand Councilor to repeatedly ask Shizong to enfeoff his son as King, but Shizong demurred. Chinese emperors were by nature almost reflexively opposed to appointing their successor, an act which created

another focus of loyalty for the court, but the unresolved war with the Southern Tang and Shizong's ongoing efforts to strengthen his control over the government and military made the Grand Councilor's requests particularly ill-timed. And while the Grand Councilor might worry about the stability of the dynasty with the emperor in the field, the emperor would naturally worry about his own stability with an established heir in the capital while he was away. An official heir would cause a scramble for influence around the new potential power center. Such an act would cause great consternation among the ambitious generals in the field who would be unable to participate in that struggle. Every political act in such a sensitive power environment could destabilize the delicately balanced system of relationships.

The greatest political factor remained, of course, the siege of Shouzhou, whose food supply had finally been exhausted after eleven months. Jing Da was forced to mount a relief operation, and sent tens of thousands of troops upstream from Haozhou to relieve Shouzhou on 3 February 957. These units fortified the Tang positions around Zijin Mountain and began to build a covered passage toward the city, which would allow them to break the siege and resupply the city. When the covered passage had almost reached Shouzhou, Li Zhongjin made a frontal assault on the Tang forces and badly beat them. He killed five thousand men and took two of the stockades near the mountain. Liu Renshan requested that Bian Hao be put in charge of the defense of Shouzhou, so that Liu could personally lead his forces in a decisive battle, but Jing Da rejected the request and Liu became sick with anger and melancholy.[27]



5. Zhou Shizong's second Huainan campaign

Shizong returns

At about that time, Shizong held a policy review. Most of his advisors felt that the Tang relief forces were still strong, and advised him to stop the campaign. He was still uncertain so, in early March, he sent several court officials to Li Gu, who was then ill at home, for his opinion. To Shizong's great pleasure, Li opined that Shouzhou would soon fall and advised the emperor to personally take the field to inspire his troops and hasten the city's fall.[28] This was remarkably similar to the pre-Gaoping debate, where a politically weak Shizong needed the cover of one of his officials' propositions to do what he wanted to do. This time, his political position had been compromised by the inconclusive campaign, raising serious questions about his military judgment. And just as before Gaoping, at least one official was willing to make the suggestion that, while looked upon with favor by Shizong, could also lead to disaster.

Shizong left the capital to take the field again on 21 March, bringing a new riverine navy of several hundred vessels with him. When the Zhou began their campaign they had had no naval forces whatsoever. The course of the campaign had made it clear to Shizong that he would need to remedy this weakness if he wanted to take Shouzhou. Surrendered and captured Tang sailors were forced to teach Zhou troops naval warfare, while ships were built west of the capital on the Bian River. The Tang generals were justifiably alarmed when they saw the Zhou navy.[29]

Shizong reached Shouzhou at the beginning of April. At dawn on 5 April, he donned his armor and, with the Zhou army south of Zijin Mountain, ordered Zhao Kuangyin to attack the Tang stockades to the north of the mountain (the ones closest to the city). Zhao overran the Tang camps and captured or killed more than three thousand men. More importantly, he also cut the covered passage into the city, putting an end to the immediate Tang relief effort. Shizong screened the other Tang stockades with covering forces to keep the Tang army

penned up while he prepared to wipe out the entire Zijin mountain position. One of the Tang commanders realized that a massive assault was in the offing and surrendered his stockade along with more than ten thousand men the night of 6 April. The following day, Shizong took up a position on the north bank of the Huai River, placed a similar force on the south bank, and readied the Zhou navy, so that he would be fully prepared to pursue and annihilate the Tang armies he expected to dislodge in the assault. Zhou forces overran all the Tang positions, and killed or captured more than ten thousand men, along with many Tang generals. The remains of the Tang forces retreated east in disarray along the Huai River, where Shizong's pre-positioned units fell on them and chased them for seventy miles. Nearly forty thousand Tang troops were killed, drowned, or captured in the pursuit, and more than a hundred thousand units of grain and a vast number of boats were also taken. When Liu Renshan heard the next day that the rescue force had been defeated, he suffered a nervous breakdown.[30]

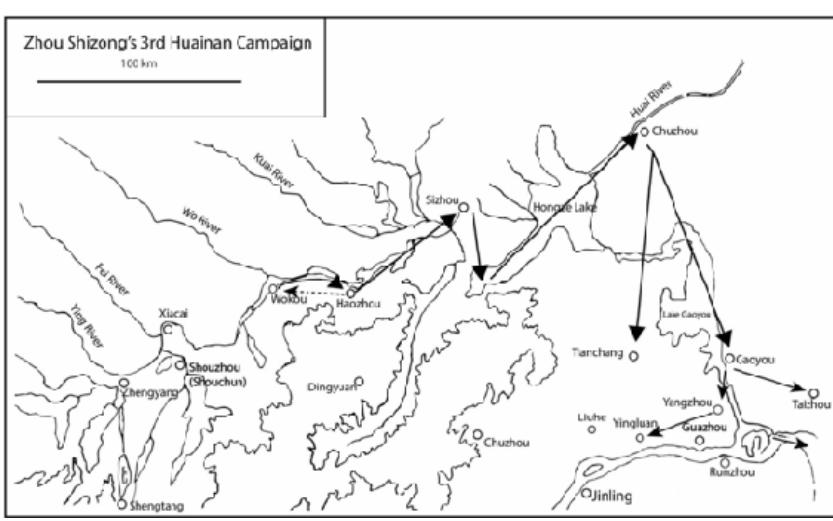
The final military act of the siege of Shouzhou came several days later, just after Shizong had the pontoon bridge moved between two forts at Zhenhuaijun. A Tang fleet sent to attack the bridge was ambushed and destroyed, ending the last attempt to relieve the city. Jing Da fled back to Jinling leaving the rest of the army to retreat without him. Shizong sent an edict to Liu Renshan from Xiacai on 15 April commanding him to surrender. The Zhou army was assembled to the north of Shouzhou on 19 April, awaiting Liu's reply. Liu had completely collapsed by that time and could not even recognize the people around him. It fell to his subordinates to draft the letter of surrender for him on 21 April and sent it to the Zhou. The city was formally surrendered over the next two days, although Liu himself was too sick to participate actively. Shizong rewarded Liu for his spirited defense of the city, which had lasted fifteen months, from 25 January 956 to 23 April 957.[31] The siege concluded, Shizong returned to Kaifeng on 14 May. Nearly a month later, on 11 June, Guo Yanwei

succeeded in cutting the pontoon bridge at Wokou, but with Shouzhou in Zhou hands, and a functioning Zhou navy on the river, the bridge was no longer the strategic objective it had once been.

The Zhou foothold across the Huai was now secure, but the army was exhausted and badly in need of refitting. Shizong turned his attention to absorbing defeated Shu and Southern Tang troops into the Zhou army, several thousand in the former case and about fifteen thousand in the latter, dredging the Bian River and having a new legal code compiled. He also approved a series of measures proposed by his officials to reduce banditry, improve agriculture, and generally attend to the livelihood of his subjects. It is impossible to measure the actual reach or effect of these administrative changes, which prevents us from taking them as a sign that Shizong's military successes were allowing him to extend the power of his government throughout his empire. All that can be said is that the acts themselves, whatever their effects, were self-consciously imperial displays, signs that Shizong intended to be more than just a conqueror. After six months of civil administration and military rebuilding, Shizong was ready to return to the field.

Shizong returns for a third time

Shizong left the capital to take the field again on 13 November. His first objective was Haozhou, and by the end of November, Li Zhongjin had broken through the city's south gate, though its defenses still held. At the beginning of December, Shizong ordered his navy to attack several hundred Tang warships camped west of the city, protected by a palisade wall of logs along the riverbank. The Zhou navy pulled up the palisade wall, burned more than seventy ships and beheaded more than two thousand men. Meanwhile, other Zhou forces took Haozhou's goat and horse wall. The Tang commander of Haozhou sent Shizong a letter on 7 December: "Your servant's family is in Jiangnan, if he now surrenders then he fears what the Tang will do to his clan. He requests that someone first be sent to Jinling to ask for orders, then he will come out and surrender." Shizong agreed to allow this, having now learned, perhaps, the value of a negotiated surrender. While waiting for the reply from Jinling, a Zhou force crushed a Tang fleet of several hundred ships sent to relieve Haozhou at Tongkou, beheading more than five thousand men and taking more than two thousand prisoners.



6. Zhou Shizong's third Huainan campaign

With matters at Haozhou temporarily on hold, Shizong went to Sizhou, sixty miles downstream from Haozhou. Zhao Kuangyin first attacked the south of the city, burning the city gate and breaking through the moon wall of the water fort. Shizong then established himself in the tower of the moon wall so that he could oversee the attack on the city. The defending general capitulated ten days later. Another Tang force of several hundred warships was driven from Tongkou by Zhou cavalry and fell back to defend the mouth of the Qing River. With the capture of Sizhou, which lay close to the point where the Bian Canal entered the Huai, Shizong had now secured the second of the major anchors of the Huai River defense line.[32] He then gave orders to sweep the Tang from the river. While Shizong advanced east on the northern bank with his personal troops, Zhao Kuangyin paralleled him on the south bank and the navy sailed down the middle of the river. The Zhou forces headed downstream to Chuzhou, arriving northwest of the city on 1 January, along the way completely wiping out all the Tang troops along the river. They captured, burned, or sank more than three hundred warships and killed or drowned more than seven thousand men. The Tang navy was now eliminated from the Huai River.

The commanding general of Haozhou received word from the Tang court that he could not expect to be rescued, so he surrendered the city to the Zhou, along with ten thousand soldiers and tens of thousands of *hu* of grain.[33] Well provided with troops and food, he could have mounted a resolute defense like Liu Renshan's at Shouzhou, but the situation along the Huai River had drastically changed since Shouzhou had fallen. Where Liu Renshan had been able to jeopardize the entire Zhou invasion by denying Shizong a secure foothold on the south bank of the river, a persistent defense of Haozhou when the Zhou already held most of the surrounding territory and had driven the Tang navy from the Huai River would merely be an annoyance of little strategic value. At the same time, it was also clear that the Tang court had no plan to resolve the situation

militarily or diplomatically. Once the Tang emperor had given Shizong an excuse to wipe out the Tang diplomatic mission to the Zhou court, all diplomatic intercourse had ceased. A paralyzed Tang court now passively awaited the military verdict of the battlefield.

Shizong continued to dismantle the Tang defenses piece by piece, crossing the Huai River on 2 January and camping northwest of Chuzhou. He invaded the city on 8 January, almost immediately capturing their moon wall. Soon afterward, the Tang evacuated and razed Yangzhou, and a Zhou force captured Haizhou. Chuzhou itself fell on 16 February after the defenders had exhausted their arrows and weapons. Rather than submit, the entire garrison committed suicide by poison, leaving more than a thousand men dead. Their stubborn defense had been admirable, but entirely futile. While besieging Chuzhou, Shizong had turned his attention to sending his warships from the Huai River to the Yangzi, a move that, if he could accomplish it, would entirely compromise the Tang's Yangzi defense line and threaten Jinling, the capital. There was no pre-existing inland way to cross over, however; the only waterway that even came close to connecting the two rivers being the Guan River, northwest of Chuzhou. The initial survey of the river was discouraging, as the terrain was not favorable for building an extension of the river to connect the Huai and Yangzi. It could be done, but only with a vast expenditure of time and labor. Shizong went to see for himself, drew up a plan, drafted labor from the surrounding prefecture and completed the extension in less than ten days. Several hundred Zhou warships then sailed into the Yangzi.[34] Although this remarkable feat terrified the Tang court, Shizong was not really in a position to militarily exploit the opportunity, having a limited navy and an army already stretched thin. Still, the possibility itself, and the continuing Zhou successes in the territory between the Huai and Yangzi, convinced the Tang ruler to sue for peace.

The Tang ruler offered to make the Yangzi the new border. Shizong agreed and sent back a decree that addressed the Southern

Tang ruler as “King of Jiangnan.” On 8 April, the Tang ruler officially ceded some fourteen prefectures to Shizong, agreed to provide an annual tribute of a hundred thousand units of gold or silk, and accepted the title “Ruler of the Country of Tang.”[35] This was somewhat less than half of the Southern Tang’s territory.

Shizong’s willingness to accept the proffered settlement without extensive negotiations while facing a demoralized Southern Tang military demonstrated how far he had come in military and political understanding. Despite his string of victories, and the six-month hiatus after the fall of Shouzhou, Shizong knew his position and his army were less strong than he wanted. It is also unlikely that the prefectures and counties he occupied militarily had yielded much wealth to replenish his depleted coffers. At best, he had been able to extract labor and food to support the army in the field. At worst, the areas unoccupied by his army actively supported continued resistance to the Tang cause. Shizong now understood that a political settlement was to his advantage, and would allow him to finally benefit financially, militarily, and politically from all of his efforts. He now also had the opportunity to impose real, central government rule over his newly acquired territory, something he was prevented from doing by all the regional warlords in his original lands. Indeed, it is very likely that it was this very development, the introduction of real control by the government in Kaifeng over one of the richest regions of China, which decisively tilted the balance of political and military power toward the center in north China. The Zhou court gained the kind of control that only a recent conqueror could, the ability to disregard or overturn pre-existing agglomerations of power that resisted rather than served the government. Shizong had unwittingly solved the problem which had dogged all of the various governments of the first half of the tenth century – how to make the center so much stronger than the regional powers that it could truly unify the empire.

Shizong had also gained a great appreciation for the value of water transport and an effective navy. He placed patrols on the Yangzi

on 19 April, and dredged from Biankou, opening a route allowing the Yellow River to flow to the Huai River. Combined with the previous work connecting the Huai to the Yangzi, all three rivers were now connected, just as they had been during the Tang dynasty. The military and economic advantages of such an extensive transport network were clear and intertwined. Had Shizong understood before he started his campaign that rivers could be either barriers or highways, depending upon whether one had a navy, he might have paid more attention to creating one beforehand. It was obvious that the ability to dominate the Southern Tang, and any future campaign against it, would involve naval operations on the Yangzi. With these measures in place, Shizong departed for Kaifeng on 25 April.

When the emperor reached Kaifeng on 12 May, he sent Zhang Yongde to the northern border with troops to strengthen the defenses.[36] This was putatively because the Liao had taken advantage of the southern campaign to raid Zhou territory. At first glance, this seems rather curious because no source records any Liao raid into Zhou territory of any kind during the Huainan campaign. Though there may well have been some minor cross border raiding that was too small-scale to get recorded, this was really an excuse to begin preparations for a campaign against the Liao. Shortly after sending Zhang Yongde to the northern border, on 31 May, a Song force attacked and captured Shucheng in Liao territory.

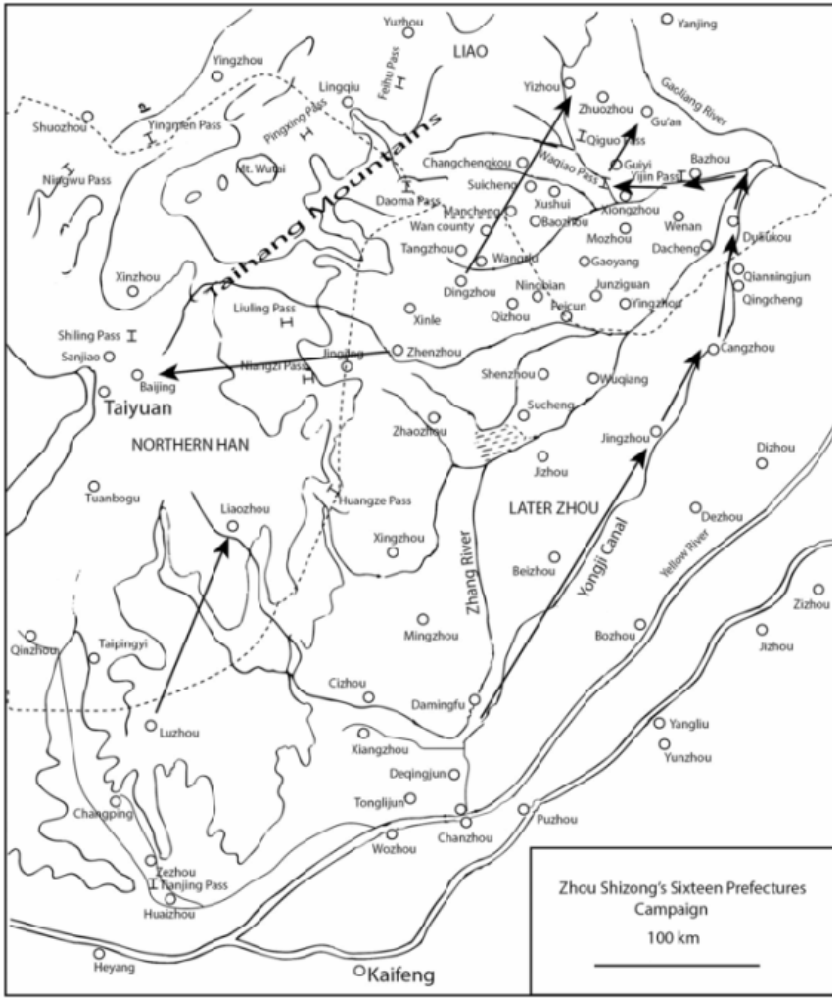
Over the next few months, Shizong not only continued to tie up loose ends with the Southern Tang and began to exert outward pressure against his northern border, but he also tried to capitalize on his enhanced imperial image by advancing domestic reforms. He had already put considerable effort into rewarding his victorious generals, assigning many of them to govern prefectures in the newly captured territory, but it was now time to put the empire in administrative order. Shizong promulgated a new legal code in late July, followed by a new land survey. A few dozen officials were sent to tour the various prefectures south of the Yellow River and equalize the taxes in

December, and all of the militias in the Huainan region were ordered to demobilize and return to farming. The difficulty of this attempt to assert imperial control, and also the enormity of the task, can be seen in the length of time it took to get any information at all, as it was 23 March 959, the next year, when the report for Kaifeng came in. It may not be an artifact of the sources that the only figures for the lands recovered for taxation were those directly around the capital, in Kaifeng superior prefecture. As a result of the survey, forty-two thousand *qing* (approx. 15.1 acres) of "surplus" land were added to the previous figure of a hundred and two thousand *qing* of land. Thirty-eight thousand *qing* of that land was exempted from taxation by imperial decree. Similar exemptions of taxes were done when the returns from the various prefectures came in, though we have no figures for anywhere else.[37] What is most significant, though, is that officials were only sent into the sixty prefectures south of the Yellow River, that is to say, only those areas where the imperial army had just been or still remained. The Huainan campaign had necessitated an enormous traffic in armies from Kaifeng south, which almost certainly helped Shizong assert imperial control over those areas. This may well have influenced Shizong's next choice for conquest.

It had begun to seem as if Shizong's next target would be the kingdom of Shu. His first attempt to obtain political concessions through diplomacy, using Gao Baorong, the ruler of the tiny kingdom of Jingnan, had failed. By 15 November, he had, in fact, decided to attack Shu. At the same time, Gao Baorong tried a second time to convince the Shu ruler to concede politically to the Zhou. This time, the Shu ruler called a conference of his officials and generals to discuss it. The main question for the officials was whether or not the generals thought they could stop a Zhou invasion. When the generals unanimously declared that they could, the Shu ruler decided to reject the Zhou overture, and had a letter sent to that effect on 3 December.[38] Gao Baorong, hearing that the Zhou imperial army was planning to attack Shu, requested that the Zhou navy proceed through

the Three Gorges, in his kingdom. The presence of the Zhou navy on the Yangzi, and Zhou political influence over states like Gao's Jingnan, had opened up the possibility of invading Shu from the north and east.

Someone convinced Li Yu, the Zhou commanding general for the Shu invasion, that it would be easy to capture Shu's Guianzhen, in Jinzhou, only a hundred miles to the south. In late December, Li took a small force into Shu territory and was captured and beheaded by the Shu army in January of 959, with his entire force wiped out. Li's failure, and the general diplomatic tensions, sent the Shu military into full-scale defensive preparations. Sixty thousand troops were called up and positioned across the key invasion routes. Yet the Zhou invasion would never come, that would ultimately fall to the Song. For the first few months of 959, the only significant event was the Southern Tang ruler's decision to retreat into his inner palace. The strains of ruling had simply proven too much for him.



7. Zhou Shizong's Sixteen Prefectures campaign

By March, Shizong seems to have changed his mind about invading Shu. He began to direct his efforts toward further renovation of the water transport system, ordering the Bian River dredged and then extended to connect with the Cao River in order to link Chen and Ying prefectures, and the Wuzhang Canal dredged east through Cao, Qi, and Liangshan.[39] Waterways were very much on his mind as he suddenly launched an attack on the Liao.

The Sixteen Prefectures campaign (29 April – 27 July 959)

Before turning to the campaign, we must consider why Shizong attacked the Sixteen Prefectures rather than the kingdom of Shu. Though no particular reason is given in the sources, four possibilities are most likely. First, with the Shu army on alert, an invasion would be much more difficult. Second, a famine in Huainan, necessitated sending relief supplies, and made a naval invasion up the Yangzi more difficult. Third, an attack on the Liao was unexpected. It seems very likely that Shizong managed to achieve strategic surprise. Fourth, a northern campaign gave him the opportunity to assert stronger control over the northern parts of Zhou territory, areas that had thus far maintained some independence. Without further evidence, however, there is no way of knowing why Shizong made the decision he did.

Shizong announced that he was going to the northern border at the end of April, sending an army to block Xishan Pass, which the Northern Han forces would use to come to the aid of the Liao, and a naval flotilla under Han Tong to prepare the way by repairing the waterways into Liao territory. Repairs were made on the damaged embankments and thirty-six locks were opened, allowing the Ying and Mo rivers to flow. Shizong himself reached the border on 26 May and immediately led tens of thousands of infantry and cavalry from Cangzhou across the Liao border. The Liao prefect of Ningzhou surrendered the city to him the next day. Shizong boarded ship on 1 June and sailed north in a flotilla ten miles long to Shuliukou and then west to Yijinguan, where the Liao commander surrendered the city to him. From that point west, the waterway was not navigable, so Shizong abandoned it. The Liao commander of Waqiaoguan surrendered his city to an advance Zhou force on 7 June, followed by the surrender of Mozhou the next day, and then Yingzhou on 9 June. This completed the conquest of the Guannan region by the Zhou,

containing three prefectures with seventeen counties and 18,360 households.[40]

Shizong feasted his generals the next day and raised the idea of trying to capture Youzhou, and by extension, the rest of the Sixteen Prefectures. Much to his displeasure, they were unanimously opposed to continuing the campaign, arguing that the emperor had already been away from his capital for forty-two days, the troops had not yet bloodied their swords, and the Liao army was gathered to Youzhou's north, and thus out of immediate reach of their army.[41] This was a rather odd war council in several respects, both because Shizong had clearly not consulted his generals before starting the campaign and because he entirely disregarded their opposition to continuing it. Once again, and for the final time, Shizong would not accept an easy gain, choosing instead to gamble for a larger return. His accomplishment in bloodlessly capturing the Guannan region was actually quite brilliant. He had achieved both strategic and tactical surprise, overwhelming the Liao defenders in a *coup de main*. And though he made a pretense of consulting his generals, he had decided considerably beforehand to proceed. The feast was thus an attempt to garner the generals' support, to give them the opportunity to freely suggest that they should continue on to Youzhou. In that they disappointed him, choosing instead to raise some very important military concerns.

Shizong ascended a hill near Waqiao to observe his armies and asked what the place was called. The response was ominous, the "Sick Dragon Terrace." By the time he returned to Waqiao that night, after inspecting a site on the Anyang River where he ordered a bridge to be built, he was feeling unwell. Zhou armies continued to capture cities, and the Liao began to mobilize their forces, but Shizong's illness continued to worsen and he left Waqiaoguan to return south on 16 June.[42] The Liao cancelled their mobilization when they heard that Shizong had departed.

It must have been clear to Shizong, and those around him, that he was dying, since he launched into a flurry of promotions and

enfeoffments designed to bolster the strength of his dynasty by attaching the loyalty of the most powerful men to it. Taken against the backdrop of the continuing war on the northern border, the search for a method to secure the future before he died seems rather desperate. This sense of impending doom cannot have been helped by the death of one of Shizong's daughters on 10 July, despite a report the same day that his army had captured thirteen Northern Han forts. Shizong's first step was to establish an empress, in this case, the daughter of Fu Yanqing, the King of Wei, and to promote his eldest son, Zongxun, to King of Liang. The delicacy of Zhou internal politics, and the problems of personal versus dynastic loyalty, is clear in these two measures. Shizong had previously not only refused to elevate one of his sons and make the succession clear, he had also not appointed an empress. Even as he was dying, he did not officially designate his son heir-apparent. Yet he had to do something to create a dynastic constituency, rather than just a personal one, that is, to engender a group of powerful men who had a strong personal interest in maintaining the Zhou dynasty.

Shizong gave the two Grand Councilors Fan Zhi and Wang Pu, and the Military Affairs Commissioner, Wei Renpu, additional titles, though none of them proved particularly useful in maintaining the dynasty. As men without armies, they were impotent. On the military side, he promoted Han Tong to Assistant Imperial Guard Commander in Chief, and shifted Zhang Yongde out of his military position as Supreme Commander of the Palace Corps, substituting a variety of high-ranked political titles. Zhang was removed from his military position putatively because a two or three foot long board had been discovered bearing the inscription: "The Supreme Commander will become the Son of Heaven." He was replaced by Zhao Kuangyin, making the inscription come true. Edmund Worthy, while somewhat skeptical of this story, can see no other explanation for why Zhao Kuangyin "suddenly" replaced Zhang Yongde. This view unfortunately presents Zhang's change in position as something outside of the

context of the other promotions. Leaving aside the question of the wooden board, which would have been easy enough to produce, there would have been a very good reason to promote Zhang Yongde and replace him with Zhao. Ever since the Battle of Gaoping, Shizong had been trying to diminish the power and influence of Li Zhongjin, and to increase his own power by putting men loyal to him in the top ranks of the army and government. Zhao Kuangyin, one of Shizong's most trusted men, took over for Zhang, Shizong's usual counterbalance for Li Zhongjin, when Zhang was promoted to a position above that of Li, from which he could dominate the entire government. At the same time, Han Tong, also clearly a trusted subordinate of Shizong, was promoted to Vice Commander in Chief of the Imperial Guard, just below Li. Along with several other Shizong loyalists in the upper ranks of the Imperial Guard, this effectively isolated Li from the troops nominally under his command, while Zhang Yongde's position above him in the government isolated him from controlling that. Rather than a reasonable, if superstitious and ill-fated, reaction to an odd political prop, Shizong's promotion of Zhang was simply his last move in a longer process of isolating Li Zhongjin. In that respect, he was quite successful, though the beneficiary would not be his son.

Shizong was not yet forty when he died on 27 July 959, leaving a young son to succeed him. It was not an opportunity that any of his ambitious generals could pass up. The question was not if, but who would seize power and when would they do it. Perhaps an even more important question was whether a single individual would succeed in taking over the Zhou state whole, or whether competing factions would dismember it. Shizong's legacy was a powerful state that had expanded dramatically, and was poised to expand even more in the future. He had doubled the size of Zhou territory and vastly increased its wealth. Whether his attempt to capture the Sixteen Prefectures would have succeeded had his death not brought all of the generals rushing back to the capital is uncertain. Several later attempts started out well, only to fail once the Liao military was mobilized. Regardless,

the Guannan region remained in the hands of the Zhou's successor, the Song, until 1127.

The final act of the Zhou: Gongdi's brief reign

Shizong's son, posthumously known as Gongdi, was six years old when he became emperor. It is therefore safe to assume that he had no input in the various government decisions made in his name at that time. Who, in fact, made those decisions is unfortunately unclear, though they would seem to have been aware of, and continued, Shizong's political program. The round of promotions that followed Gongdi's ascension was entirely consistent with Shizong's pre-mortem promotions. The top command positions were dominated by a single group of men who had all served Zhou Shizong, with the exception of Li Zhongjin and Han Tong. At some point during Gongdi's reign, presumably after he was made military governor of Huainan, Li moved to Yangzhou, leaving Han Tong as the highest-ranking Imperial Guard commander. Indeed, it may well have been Li's move to Yangzhou that created the conditions necessary for the coup that overthrew the infant emperor.

Everyone was promoted without changing their relative positions within the military command structure. Li Zhongjin and Han Tong were as isolated after the round of promotions as they had been before. Neither man appears to have understood their predicament and attempted to reconcile themselves with the dominant group. Li may have imagined the move to Yangzhou would give him the opportunity to build up an independent power base to replace the one he lost in the central military structure. Given his poorly conceived and executed response to the Song overthrow of the Zhou, however, it seems more likely that he was simply caught out by his change of fortune. Zhou Shizong placed his personal retainers in firm control over the Zhou military. His retainers continued their control after he died.

[1] SS 3.49.

[2] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 108–37.

[3] ZZTJ 292.9532.

[4] Sima Guang seems to imply the former by the location in the text of the Tang policy change. It seems the more likely reason.

[5] ZZTJ 292.9533–4; JWDS 115.1534–6; XWDS 12.120. JWDS contains Shizong's edict setting out his reasons for the invasions.

[6] ZZTJ 292.9534–6; JWDS 116.1539–40.

[7] ZZTJ 292.9536–7; JWDS 116.1540–1.

[8] ZZTJ 292.9538.

[9] JWDS 116.1542.

[10] ZZTJ 292.9539–40.

[11] ZZTJ 292.9541

[12] ZZTJ 293.9547–8.

[13] ZZTJ 293.9548.

[14] ZZTJ 293.9548–9.

[15] ZZTJ 293.9549–50; 293.9552.

[16] ZZTJ 293.9552

[17] ZZTJ 293.9553–4.

[18] ZZTJ 293.9555

[19] ZZTJ 293.9558.

[20] ZZTJ 293.9558.

[21] ZZTJ 293.9559.

[22] ZZTJ 293.9560.

[23] ZZTJ 293.9561.

[24] ZZTJ 293.9548–9.

[25] ZZTJ 293.9560–1.

[26] ZZTJ 293.9561.

[27] ZZTJ 293.9563.

[28] ZZTJ 293.9563.

[29] ZZTJ 293.9564.

[30] ZZTJ 293.9565–6.

[31] ZZTJ 293.9566–7; JWDS 117.1556–7.

[32] JWDS 117.1563.

[33] ZZTJ 293.9573–5.

[34] ZZTJ 293.9575–8; JWDS 118.1567.

[35] ZZTJ 293.9580–1; JWDS 118.1569–70.

[36] JWDS 118.1572.

[37] ZZTJ 294.9595; JWDS 118.1574.

[38] ZZTJ 294.9587

[39] ZZTJ 294.9594–5; JWDS 119.1580.

[40] ZZTJ 294.9595–7; JWDS 119.1580–1.

[41] ZZTJ 294.9597; JWDS 119.1581.

[42] ZZTJ 294.9598; JWDS 119.1581.

5

The army and the creation of the Song dynasty

Are you saying that it's easy to be the Heaven's Son?

– Song Taizu[1]

Donning a yellow robe at Chen Bridge Station

On 31 January 960, messengers arrived from Zhen and Ding prefectures reporting that the Liao had invaded, and that they had linked up with a Northern Han force raiding east from Tumen. Zhao Kuangyin was ordered to lead a campaign against the invasion, and the vanguard under Murong Yanzhao left the following day. Zhao followed with the van of the army on 2 February, leaving a tense capital filled with rumors of an impending *coup d'etat*.[2] Despite whatever intimations or suspicions anyone within the government may have had concerning this possibility, there was really very little they could have done to prevent it. With the military already in the hands of the conspirators, and Li Zhongjin in distant Yangzhou, there was no one capable of mounting an immediate response except Han Tong. In the event, Han, who had ignored earlier warnings about Zhao Kuangyin, tried to mount a defense of the dynasty and became the only immediate casualty of the coup.

All the sources portray the coup as arising spontaneously from the commanders of the Zhou army, with the men primarily motivated by the desire to have a ruler old enough to appreciate their efforts in defense of the empire. Zhao Kuangyin was thus forced to become emperor, and reluctantly accepted only after extracting a promise from his subordinates to take good care of the young emperor and dowager empress, and not plunder the capital. Nevertheless, the coup was clearly a well-planned, well-executed operation, and it is quite impossible that it could have come off so smoothly without all the top leadership, including Zhao Kuangyin, being actively involved from the beginning. At the most basic level, the very fact that a yellow, imperial robe was ready to be placed on a "surprised" Zhao shows obvious preparation.

8. The Song dynasty in 960

By contrast, at least as described by Sima Guang, when Guo Wei overthrew the Later Han dynasty in 950, the “unexpected” move by his officers and troops to make him emperor required them to drape a yellow banner over his shoulders.[3] Neither Ouyang Xiu in the *Xin Wudai Shi*, nor Xue Juzheng in the *Jiu Wudai Shi*, mention anything about a yellow banner.[4] Sima Guang sets up an obvious parallel between the Later Zhou and Song founding, with a supreme military leader setting off on an expedition and turning around to seize power. The Song founding was clearly a better-planned *coup d’etat* with even the correct wardrobe supplied for the act of political theatre.

It is possible that the Later Zhou plan was a blueprint for the Song plan, as a well-known story that took place a decade before. I can only

offer some speculation about two more tenuous explanations of why Sima Guang presented such clear markers of parallelism. First, he may have done so to show the Later Zhou as a negative example compared to the Song. Both started the same way, but the Song became a stable, long-lasting dynasty and the Zhou did not. Second, Sima may have been showing that both founding acts were equally premeditated rebellions, with the Song one showing refinements on the Zhou one. Ouyang Xiu stated simply that Guo Wei "rebelled" against the Han, as he clearly did. But if Guo Wei "rebelled," then so did Zhao Kuangyin. Of course, both Sima Guang and Ouyang Xiu (and Xue Juzheng, for that matter) avoided directly facing such a characterization of the founder of the Song by ending their histories at the Song founding.

Shortly after Zhao Kuangyin, now perhaps more appropriately Song Taizu, took the throne, the Liao and Northern Han troops withdrew without encountering Song troops.[5] Since the *Liaoshi* does not record any such military activity at that time, and the winter was not a usual time for raiding, it seems safe to assume that the original messages were manufactured for the purposes of the coup. At the same time, Han Tong, who had been the greatest immediate threat to the coup's success, had been intercepted en route to rally resistance and murdered. With Li Zhongjin in Yangzhou and Han Tong dead, Taizu and his fellow generals, the old core of Shizong's retainers, were in complete control of all the armies in the capital. This group had been formed by Shizong, promoted because of their performance at Gaoping, and advanced as the bulwark of Shizong's rule. The Song founding was thus the open acknowledgment of this group's dominance of the government. Its success in the short term was due not only to the positions held by its members, but also their group cohesion and size. Their personal ties of loyalty to one another bridged the institutional weakness of the military–government structure and created a window of stability for the new dynasty.

But if the new, in name at least, Song government controlled the armies in and around the capital, several other contenders for power

in the provinces were actively contemplating trying to overturn the new political situation through force. The most obvious and prominent political loser was Li Zhongjin, the man the group who became the Song founders had been constituted to marginalize and defeat in the first place. Shizong had wrought well, but Taizu did not wish to foreclose the possibility of a non-violent resolution of Li's status with respect to the new dynasty. Li was left in his position as Military Governor of Huainan, though Han Lingkun took over his position as Commander in Chief of the Imperial Guard, and Shi Shouxin replaced the late Han Tong as Vice Commander in Chief. The risk of initially leaving Li in place at Yangzhou was minimal, he might have been able to become a legitimate rallying point for Zhou loyalists, but the benefits of leaving him his position were great. First, as long as Li held the position, it could be taken away. Second, the fact that a man like Li Zhongjin, who could be assumed to be opposed to the Song founders, had not been thrown out with the creation of the new dynasty would reassure other power-holders concerned about their positions that they would not be displaced. Third, less change also meant less instability within the central government.

Taizu gave Han Tong a respectable burial with all the proper rites, and made every effort to minimize the change the Song founding involved. Indeed, there was remarkably little immediate change in personnel at the top of the military or government. In addition to Shi Shouxin's promotion in the Imperial Guard hierarchy, Han Lingkun remained as Provost Marshal; Zhang Guanghan became Commander in Chief of the Cavalry; and Zhao Yanhui, the Commander in Chief of the Infantry. In the Palace Corps, Gao Huaide became the Vice Supreme Commander; Zhang Lingduo became the Provost Marshal; and Wang Shenqi, its Commander in Chief. Taizu's previous position as Supreme Commander fell to Murong Yanzhao.[6]

The Imperial Guard

Commander in Chief
Li Zhongjin

Vice Commander in Chief
Shi Shouxin
Provost Marshal
Han Lingkun

Commander in Chief of the Cavalry	Commander in Chief of the Infantry
Zhang Guanghan	Zhao Yanhui

The Palace Corps

Supreme Commander
Murong Yanzhao
Vice Supreme Commander
Gao Huaide
Commander in Chief
Wang Shenqi
Provost Marshal
Zhang Lingduo

On a personal, or perhaps personnel, level, the Song founding was really a shift within a ruling group rather than the replacement of one group with another. Fu Yanqing, for example, the father of the now deposed Zhou empress, was hardly affected by the coup since another of his daughters was married to Taizu's younger brother, Kuangyi. The political changes were also almost imperceptible at the official level. Several other non-military officials were promoted into the imperial court, but they did not displace or replace the incumbent officials, like Grand Councilors Wang Pu and Fan Zhi.

The most significant new Song official was Zhao Pu, Taizu's closest advisor, and probably the most influential man in the new dynasty after the emperor himself. The only person who came close to his influence was Zhao Kuangyi, and their power struggle would be one of the most important undercurrents of Taizu's reign. For the moment, however, their mutual interest in stabilizing and strengthening the Song was more important than their inherent struggle for control of the government. Whereas in the military command, Li Zhongjin's continued presence was the only clear disjuncture between institutional and real power, in the government, the dissonance was much greater. Real power flowed from the emperor through personal ties, and it would take some time to adjust the official institutional arrangements to accurately reflect those

relationships. All of the arrangements were temporary in 960, of course, but they served to promote the image that not much had changed with the new dynasty.

Li Zhongjin, while the most likely candidate to oppose the Song founding, was not the only possible troublemaker for the new regime. Three other Zhou loyalists, Li Yun, Guo Chong, and Yuan Yan were also poised to dispute the Zhou overthrow. All three seem to have been true loyalists, in the sense that they were not members of the Zhou imperial family, but rather were acting out of loyalty to it. As a member of the Zhou imperial family, Li Zhongjin had been personally damaged by the Song coup, and thus any action on his part to reverse it had less of the flavor of loyalty and more of personal revenge. Li Yun would be the first to act, and the first to be crushed, dissuading Guo Chong and Yuan Yan from continuing their own plans. Li Zhongjin also made an attempt, but he too was rapidly defeated.

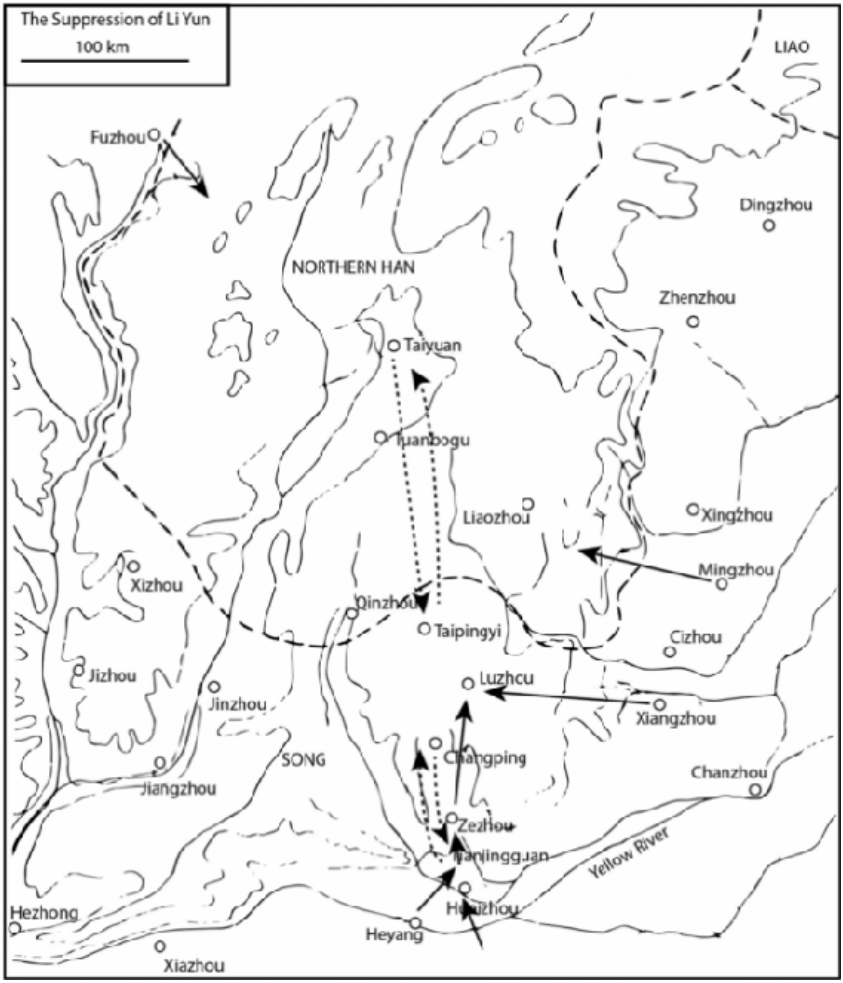
Crucial to the success of Taizu and his comrades was their unity, and their opponents' disunity. The Zhou loyalists were unable to coordinate their efforts and develop into a broad movement, allowing them to be defeated piecemeal. Their disunity was not accidental, it was the product of Zhou Shizong's policy of breaking up and weakening any other power group outside of his own. Li Zhongjin had been especially targeted for isolation as part of a policy aimed at preventing him from being able to marshal enough military force to mount a *coup d'etat*. The policy worked perfectly. The other Zhou loyalists had been similarly isolated and prevented from forming the kind of network of relationships necessary to develop dynasty-challenging power.

Li Zhongjin tried to coordinate his uprising with that of Li Yun, but unfortunately, he chose Di Shouxun as his messenger to Li Yun. Di secretly went to Taizu and revealed the plan. Taizu sent Di back to Li Zhongjin with orders to convince him to delay the beginning of his uprising.[7] Di was apparently successful in his efforts, allowing Taizu to deal with Li Yun in the north before turning to the south to deal

with Li Zhongjin. Yet some blame for the failed coordination must also be placed with Li Zhongjin himself. He was first too cautious in not immediately beginning his uprising once Li Yun began his, and then was too impetuous in deciding to go ahead with his uprising after Li Yun had been defeated. Yuan Yan and Guo Chong both wisely gave up their idea of opposing the Song after Li Yun's defeat. The swift and decisive actions of Taizu and his comrades was an effective stick, and the implicit offer that acceptance of Song rule allowed continuation in one's current position was an effective carrot in convincing even some of the most truculent and loyal men, like Yuan and Guo, to accept the new regime.

The rebellion of Li Yun (10 May–15 July 960)[8]

Taizu sent an envoy to Li Yun, the Military Governor of Zhaoyi, on 10 May 960 with Zhou Shizong's son's edict of abdication. Li reluctantly received the envoy, but made it abundantly clear that he was deeply unhappy about the Song founding. Although Li subsequently passed along to the Song court a secret letter the Northern Han ruler had sent him in order to demonstrate his loyalty, he was, in fact, accelerating his military preparations. Taizu tried without success to head off a rebellion by appointing Li's son to a central court position. On 12 May, Li contacted the Northern Han ruler, and sent troops to seize Zezhou, which was loyal to Taizu, and take the city.[9] Before taking those actions, Li could have backed down and accepted Taizu as emperor like his son and all of his advisors suggested. He chose instead to begin his uprising before he was fully prepared, and in the face of direct evidence that his opponent was expecting him.



9. Song Taizu's suppression of Li Yun

Li's advisors opposed rebellion not because they believed the Song had Heaven's Mandate, but because of practical considerations of the military and political situation. Lu Qiuzhong advised Li that a direct confrontation with the Song army was inadvisable even with the unlikely, Lu thought, aid of the Northern Han. The better strategy was to take up a defensive position west of the Taihang Mountains, block the north–south invasion routes, and then move east toward Luoyang. Lu understood that Taizu would have to respond quickly and actively to Li's rebellion, since the empire would fragment if uprisings by military governors were not rapidly, and decisively, crushed. But Li rejected Lu's advice, assuming that the imperial armies would support

him as a Zhou standard bearer and former commander, and that his own forces were fully up to the task.[10]

Li's declaration of war arrived at the Song court on 15 May. The Song army immediately marched north, taking control of the northern passes on 17 May. Li was now prevented from marching south, and his apparent desire to seek battle opened the possibility of a quick resolution of the rebellion, an opportunity Taizu could not pass up. By 29 May, Song forces were also blocking Li from crossing the Yellow River if he turned east.[11]

Li's long service on the border had given him a deep-seated dislike of the Liao, a bias that further undermined his already shaky plan since, when he exchanged envoys with the Northern Han ruler on 30 May, he stipulated that Liao troops not take part with the Northern Han troops in supporting his action. Li's stipulation was accepted, reminding us again of the Northern Han ruler's desire to seek military accomplishments independent of his Liao patrons. The meeting with the Han ruler went poorly. Li was unimpressed with the Han ruler's personal guard, refused to discuss strategy, and demonstrated an ostentatious loyalty to the Zhou dynasty, the Han ruler's arch foe.

Li left his oldest son behind at Taipingyi and led his army of thirty thousand troops south from Shangdang. The Song army defeated Li at Changping on 1 June, beheading more than three thousand men and capturing Dahui Fort. With Li Yun's attack already slightly blunted, it was time for Taizu to take the field himself. The Song army defeated Li Yun's army of more than thirty thousand south of Zezhou on 25 June, forcing Li to fall back on the city of Zezhou, while his son retreated into Luzhou. Taizu himself arrived at Zezhou on 27 June to supervise the attack on the city but, after ten days, Zezhou had still not fallen. Since Taizu had been trying to avoid a protracted struggle to dislodge Li Yun from strong defensive positions, he ordered the army to storm the city. The fighting was so desperate that Taizu had to lead his own bodyguard in support of the attack. He captured the city on 9 July, and Li committed suicide by throwing

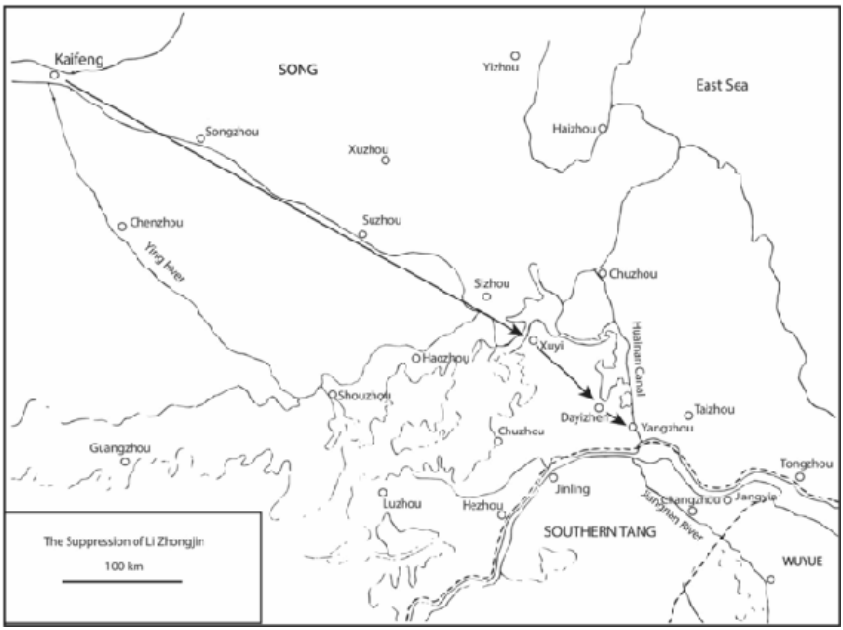
himself into a fire. The Northern Han ruler heard that Li had been defeated and returned to Taiyuan. Taizu attacked Luzhou on 13 July, and Li's son surrendered two days later.[12]

Li Yun's defeat was extremely important, and the campaign had nearly degenerated into exactly the sort of drawn out contest that Taizu had been trying to avoid. Despite Li Yun's strategic incompetence, his early defeat in the field had naturally driven him back onto his fortified positions. It was the combination of his continued inability to shift to a slower, more attrition-like strategy, and the desperate storming of Zezhou, which ended the rebellion before anyone else could take advantage of the situation. Yet for all of Li's incompetence, and all of the force at Taizu's disposal, it was a very near-run campaign. The entire Song enterprise hung on the results of the battlefield, and was decided as much by Li Yun's vacillation as by Taizu's army.

While Taizu was feasting and rewarding his victorious generals, several other Zhou loyalists heard the news of Li Yun's defeat and concluded that they would be better off accepting the Song.[13] In a single stroke, the Song's northern border was secured from any internal problems. Even the Southern Tang ruler concluded that he had to deal with the Song court, and sent congratulations to Taizu on putting down Li Yun. This still left Li Zhongjin in the south, but Taizu was feeling secure enough to contemplate a campaign against the Northern Han. He secretly asked Zhang Yongde about it, but Zhang advised against it pointing out that not only were the Northern Han soldiers extremely capable, but also that the Liao would come to their aid. For the moment, it was better to continue the policy of annual raids to disturb their agriculture and extensive spying. Taizu accepted this, and put aside a campaign against the Northern Han.[14]

In the brief breathing period between Li Yun's rebellion and Li Zhongjin's, Taizu turned to resolving certain family issues of great political importance. On 10 September, Taizu officially established his wife as empress and made his older sister Grand Princess of Yan.[15]

Later that month, she married Gao Huaide, the Vice Supreme Commander of the Palace Corps.[16] This was the first political marriage of the Song court, initiating a continuing process of intermarriage between the founding generals and the imperial family. It presaged the internal political consolidation of the Song that began in earnest after Li Zhongjin was defeated in late 960.



10. Song Taizu's suppression of Li Zhongjin

The rebellion of Li Zhongjin (15 October – 2 December 960)[17]

Li Zhongjin was the Military Governor of Huainan, based at Yangzhou, when Zhao Kuangyin and his co-conspirators overthrew the Zhou dynasty. This was no surprise, as Li had long recognized and feared Zhao's ambitions. Li was still a very powerful man, with many adherents scattered throughout the former Zhou territories, so when asked permission to come to court, Taizu put him off. Had he been allowed to come to court while still powerful, and while the Song was still weak, he might have been able to wrest significant concessions from Taizu that would have increased and perpetuated his power. Taizu did not want to fight Li if it could be avoided, but he also did not want to deal with him from anything except a position of strength. In effect, Taizu would only accept Li Zhongjin's submission to the new dynasty if Li was willing to accept continued weakening and marginalization. If Li would not accept a vastly diminished position, then it was better to fight him and end a threat to dynastic stability.

Taizu's diplomatically worded rejection of Li's request only increased Li's uneasiness. He began to recruit bandits, heighten the walls of Yangzhou, deepen its moat, and made plans to rebel. Taizu had suborned Li Zhongjin's attempt to coordinate his rebellion with Li Yun, with Li Zhongjin's emissary instead convincing Li to delay his own uprising. That the emissary succeeded in this, demonstrated Li Zhongjin's startling indecisiveness and strategic incompetence. It would take very little strategic vision to see that even an uncoordinated attack on the new dynasty coming from south and north would be considerably harder to defeat than two separate attacks launched at different times.

Taizu promoted Li on 4 October, which actually increased Li's anxiety, and two days later, sent an emissary to see him. The three-month delay between Li Yun's death and confronting Li Zhongjin had

presumably been used to bring the army back from the north, refit it, and position it to crush Li Zhongjin if he rebelled. Li was initially inclined to return to Kaifeng, thus accepting Song rule, but his advisors argued against it. Instead, he imprisoned Taizu's emissary, intensified his preparations to rebel, and sent a message to the Southern Tang seeking assistance. The Tang ruler reported the request to the Song court.[18]

Li's declaration of war arrived at the Song court on 15 October. The Song army immediately converged on Yangzhou from several routes. Taizu summoned Zhao Pu to discuss the situation in 11 November, whereupon Zhao pointed out that Li was cut off from outside aid and low on supplies; he advised Taizu to personally take part in the campaign. Taizu sailed southeast from the capital on 15 November, disembarking at Sizhou on 29 November. As he was proceeding, a report arrived on 2 December that Yangzhou was about to fall. Taizu reached the city that night just as the city was captured. Li Zhongjin gathered his family together in a house and set fire to it, killing himself and his family.[19]

In the aftermath, Taizu executed Li Zhongjin's close retainers in Yangzhou's market, distributed food to the populace, and amnestied Li Zhongjin's family dependents. He was now beginning to think ahead toward other conquests, as evidenced by the threatening posture he took toward the Southern Tang emissaries on 15 December. He questioned their relationship with Li Zhongjin, and mentioned that his generals wanted him immediately to invade the Southern Tang. The Tang envoy replied that, while Taizu was capable of conquering the Southern Tang, a campaign would be risky, victory was uncertain, and, even if all went well, it would cost him the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers. Taizu avowed that he was just kidding, but his point had been made. If that was not enough, Taizu terrified the Tang ruler by having his troops practice naval warfare at Yingluan.[20] This was an emperor who understood the use of intimidation.

Li Zhongjin's defeat was really the last step in a process initiated

and mostly carried out by Zhou Shizong following the Battle of Gaoping in 954. Shizong had carefully crafted the Zhou military to gradually drive Li out of power, and to do so in such a way that he would not rebel until it was already too late. It had taken six years to succeed and, now that it had, it left a peculiar military–personal network complex at the apex of the Song government. The Song military, and de facto the Song government, was still controlled by Shizong's network of "loyal" generals. The task before Song Taizu was to find a way to dismantle this network, of which he was a part, or to disentangle it from the workings of the military and government, without precipitating a violent conflict that would destroy his fledgling regime. This would prove to be a complex and extremely subtle process carried out through Taizu's personal relationships with each member of that network. It is also something that has been generally misconstrued as an institutional process of demilitarization, rather than a personal, political process of institutionalizing the power of Zhou Shizong's military network into the Song imperial family.

Dissolving military power with a cup of wine[21]

With the immediate military challenges to the Song dynasty settled, Taizu turned to three interrelated problems of empire building: creating lasting internal political and military stability; increasing his imperial dignity, and thus solidifying his own, personal authority; and rebuilding and reviving the economy of the territory he controlled. Since the resolution of what to do with Taizu's group of comrades solved the first two problems at least momentarily, it is easy to mistake them for a single issue. It is similarly easy to put the immense efforts to revive the economy and infrastructure into an entirely separate category from the political and military issues. But the power and stability of the dynasty was different from the power and authority of the emperor ruling that dynasty, and fundamental economic retrenchment and large-scale infrastructure projects required and affected political and military strength. The distinctions and connections between these three problems is harder to parse at the inception of the Song, when Taizu embodied the dynasty in his own person, and economic policies seemed to be merely the ordinary actions of a properly functioning government. There were no "ordinary" functions of government in 960, however, and no regular channels of political power. Power was a personal, not institutional, commodity comprising the money, loyalty, and naked force an individual could bring to bear on a task. Taizu's efforts to create a functioning government responsive to his will was thus an explicit effort to arrogate all money, loyalty, and force to himself.

Huang K'uan-chung and Nap-Yin Lau's characterization of Taizu as "more a shrewd renovator than innovator," is a useful corrective to the previous, widely held view that Taizu was a great institution builder.[22] If anything, Huang and Lau do not got far enough in revising this view. For the most part, Taizu simply ignored the formal

structures of the government and moved along the lines of least resistance to accomplish his political and military objectives. Sometimes, those lines coincided with the pre-existing formal structure, and sometimes they did not, but as the founding emperor, his de facto procedures were subsequently formalized. Hence, the institutional perspective is fundamentally teleological with respect to Taizu. Perhaps more importantly, the most critical political events of the early Song, like the "Dissolving military power over a cup of wine" incident, which stabilized the internal politics of the government and army, and vastly increased Taizu's personal authority as emperor, in no way altered the formal structures of the government or military.[23]

Taizu succeeded in creating a long-lived dynasty because, as Edmund Worthy put it: "… after the coup, he [Song Taizu] adroitly avoided repaying obligations to cohorts in a manner that might jeopardize his own power."[24] Worthy's point is well taken, because although Taizu did repay his debts to his comrades, he found a way to do so which stabilized and increased his own power. He did not remove them from power; he removed them from command of the imperial armies. This was a gradual process, negotiated between men who trusted each other.

It was this trust that made Song Taizu the first emperor in two centuries to have a central government army stronger than any of the military governors' armies. The reason he had this power was much less any sort of institutional evolution which shifted power from the provinces to the center, than the personal connections in the network of generals controlling the central government's armies. Like so many other usurping generals before him, Taizu had rewarded his old comrades with positions of supreme military authority after the coup. This created, or at least did not dissipate, an obvious source of instability, the generals themselves. But unlike so many previous new emperors, Taizu was able to use those selfsame personal connections to move them out of that threatening position. There were two parts to buying out their positions: marriage ties with Taizu's family, and

continued power as military governor of some area outside the capital. Gao Huaide had already married Taizu's older sister in September of 960. On 18 April 961, Murong Yanzhao and Han Lingkun left their positions as Supreme Commander of the Palace Corps and Commander in Chief of the Imperial Guard respectively, and took up duties as military governors.[25] Shi Shouxin replaced Han, but Murong's position was left vacant and never filled again.

Han Lingkun and Murong Yanzhao's departure left only four other men, Shi Shouxin, Wang Shenqi, Gao Huaide, and Zhang Lingduo in a position to threaten the dynasty. Gao and Wang's control was, however, somewhat contained by Taizu's younger brother, Zhao Kuangyi's position as Provost Marshal of the Palace Corps. If the threat was obvious, the solution was less so. Zhao Pu repeatedly tried to convince Taizu to remove them from their positions, but it took until 20 August 961 before he responded positively. Taizu's reticence can be explained as part of the historiographical cover necessary for an emperor in disenfranchising his loyal supporters, but it is more likely that the argument with Zhao Pu was actually over the timing and process of moving the generals out of power. Zhao was anxious that it happen sooner, and in a more direct manner, by simply ordering them to take other posts. Taizu was satisfied with a slower pace, and believed that he had to convince the generals to leave, rather than ordering them out. Both men knew that the only way Taizu could fully act as emperor was for his comrades to leave court. The departure of the highest generals would stabilize the regime by removing en masse the only other credible contenders for the throne, and would vastly elevate the dignity of the emperor by increasing the gap between the throne and the next highest ranking official. The commanders of the imperial army were far more powerful at that time than any civil official, and certainly more dangerous to the dynasty. Removing the generals was also the first step in reducing the status of all officials vis-à-vis the emperor. If the generals had to be reduced more than the civil officials, it was because they were so much more

powerful.

Taizu finally relented and conceded to Zhao Pu's push for an earlier attempt to solve the problem, but followed his own method. He met with his comrades and made a reasoned argument for their voluntary retirement, pointing out that their continued presence in the highest military positions made them the focus of plots by their subordinates hoping to advance themselves by elevating their commander to the throne. This instability jeopardized all of their stakes in the new dynasty. The best way to ensure the continuing value of their investment was to increase Taizu's power. Since the only way to do that was for them to sacrifice their own direct military power, he would strengthen their personal ties through marriage in order to provide them a fair return. Taizu was able to make this argument because he could be trusted and because all concerned understood that he was right about the threat to the dynasty. If they wanted the dynasty to continue, and apparently they did, Taizu's solution made a great deal of sense. The next day, they all asked to be relieved of their posts.[26]

Worthy believed that sanctions for refusal were implicit in Taizu's offer, but this is unlikely. Taizu was neither in a position, as Zhao Pu repeatedly suggested, simply to order these generals to leave their posts, nor did he have sufficient independent force available to take action against them. Murong Yanzhao and Han Lingkun's earlier departure must have been the product of similar deals, though perhaps made in less dramatic circumstances. Some doubts have been raised about the veracity of the drinking party, but at worst, it is a dramatization of a deal that was actually made.[27] This is evident in the marriages that were made between the generals and the imperial family. Wang Shenqi's son Chengyan married Taizu's daughter; Shi Shouxin's son Baoji married Taizu's second daughter; Han Zhongyun's (one of Taizu's sworn brothers) son Chongye married Taizu's youngest brother, Tingmei's daughter; Zhang Lingduo married Zhao Kuangyi's third daughter, and Tingmei married Zhang's daughter. Hence, one of

the main ways of managing military power, if not the main one in the beginning of the dynasty, was through marriage ties to the imperial family. This deal between Taizu and his old comrades would have profound consequences for Zhao Kuangyi after he took the throne because it crystallized and institutionalized Zhou Shizong's network of "loyal" generals as the imperial family. The future Song Taizong was not part of that group, despite his brother's membership in it or his father-in-law, Fu Yanqing's, connection to Shizong. In other words, these founding generals were now loyal to the Song dynasty because they were part of the imperial family and because of their personal ties to Taizu.When those generals died, or after Taizu passed away, their families remained part of the imperial family and loyal to the dynasty, but they did not have personal ties to Taizong. Functionally, the deal made at the drinking party was a significant first step in separating the Song dynasty from the person of the specific emperor.

A less obvious aspect of Taizu's deal was that the former generals became a reserve force to bolster the dynasty. They were not pensioned off to spend their dotage in obscurity, but sent out to significant regional posts. As such, they extended Song power out of the immediate environs of the capital and the imperial army. Other Five Dynasties rulers had attempted to extend their control throughout their territory by appointing trusted retainers to regional posts, but those efforts had failed because the retainers were frequently disloyal. The mutual loyalty of Taizu and his comrades was therefore critical to the success of the Song. And even if he remained *primus inter pares* within the group, he had formally elevated his imperial dignity and increased his control of the military by truncating the pinnacle of the command hierarchy. This permanently improved the Song emperor's authority without changing the formal structure of the army.

Although the departure of the generals from the top ranks of the army was certainly a dramatic political event, more subtly, but not much less significantly, Taizu continued Shizong's efforts to

reconstruct the waterways of north China, improve the Song navy, increase the quality of the army's soldiers, and maintain law and order. The construction and rehabilitation of the waterways began on a large scale on 10 February 961, aimed at joining the Min River to the Cai River, and continuing the water route through the capital and to Shouchun, thus connecting the Huai River to shipping. Taizu visited the ship construction yards and ordered the dredging of the Wuzhang north from the capital to Yun prefecture. The goal was to improve supply transport to the east, though the emperor claimed it was for the general benefit of the capital rather than his own benefit.[28] This was, of course, a completely disingenuous remark, presumably made in defense of the projects. True, the opening up of the waterways to the capital might well aid the economy and livelihood of the capital, but in doing so, it would concentrate more control over the empire's wealth in the hands of the emperor. Also, by creating these highways of commerce that were under central government control, Taizu was grasping the reigns of economic power while creating the ability to better project military power into the surrounding territories. This is why the emperor displayed so much interest in his water transport system.

Work continued with the further dredging of the Wuzhang Canal from west of the capital to where it met the Bian River, and the excavation of a more than thirty-mile-long canal to channel water from two rivers through the capital's moat to support the flow into the Bian, going east to the Wuzhang River, to facilitate the northeast transport of supplies. Taizu personally inspected the work.[29] It is noteworthy that the emperor was so concerned about his ability to transport supplies to the east and northeast, precisely those areas most vulnerable to Liao invasion, as well as home to many longtime border generals who he had left at their posts. A subsidiary effect of the canals was their defensive value against cavalry forces, like those of the Liao. Rivers and canals consistently proved to be one of the most effective obstacles to Liao armies, something of particular importance

in the relatively open and flat territory just south of the Liao–Song border, and east and northeast of Kaifeng. And not only did imperial authority extend along the lines of these waterways, the massive drafting of corvee labor placed local commoners under the authority of the central government's officials.

In addition to observing naval warfare practices, and continuing or amending various Zhou regulations concerning crime and agriculture, on 27 June, Taizu ordered a complete review of all the soldiers inside and outside the capital. The good soldiers were to be promoted into the ranks of the imperial army, and the bad ones retired.[30] On 9 December of the following year, he repeated the process, this time concentrating on improving the quality of the Palace Corps and Imperial Guard, and reducing their number of troops.[31] The obvious military and economic benefits of the policy, however, disguised its profound political value. Taizu was actually reorganizing and reordering the army at a fundamental level, breaking up old relationships of power throughout the ranks and recreating the Zhou army into the Song army. Again, he apparently changed none of the institutional structures of the military, only the personnel occupying its positions. He first removed his comrades from their commands, then brought the best soldiers outside the imperial armies into it and retired the poor ones, and, finally, reduced the number of imperial troops. It was all part of the same process of strengthening his control over the army, improving its effectiveness and decreasing costs. It was a slow process, however, and each new step required considerable political strength to carry out. Yet with each successful effort, Taizu's political and military strength increased, and that of the provincial power-holders and generals decreased. Ultimately then, Taizu's consolidation of the Song dynasty was a political process carried out through the military.

Taizu was a much less impetuous man than Shizong and, realizing that there were many internal problems which war did not solve, did not immediately turn to outward military campaigns. His first

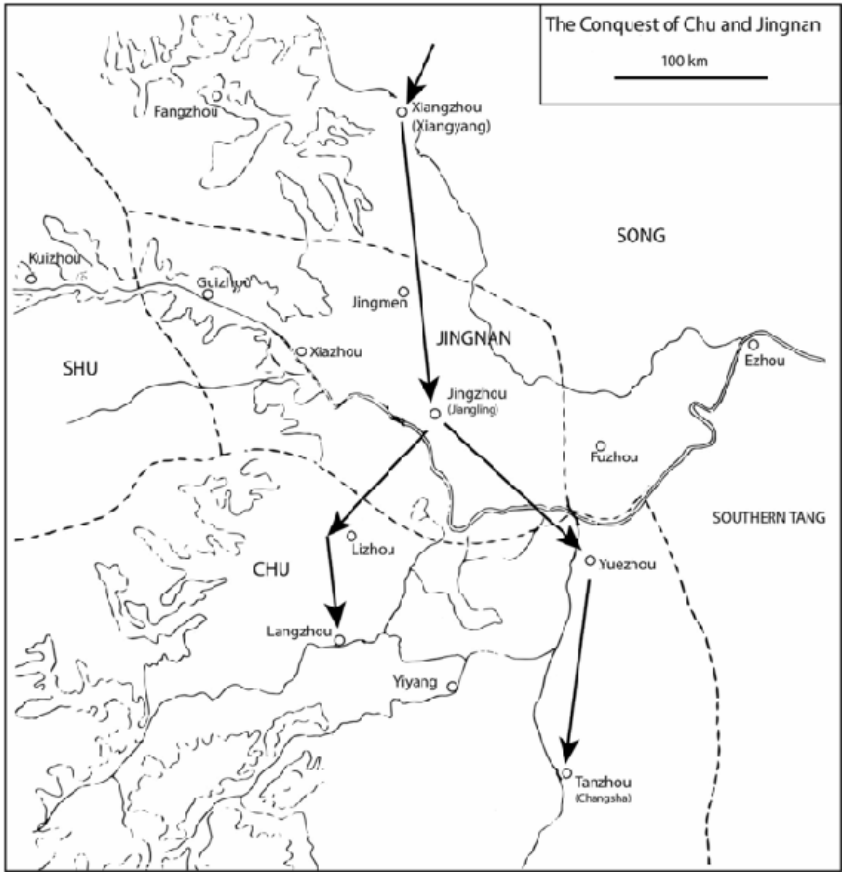
conquests would come more than three years after he took the throne, a fact often overlooked in discussions of his subsequent military success, and the success of the dynasty. And even that conquest, of the minor states of Chu and Jingnan, was just a convenient target of opportunity whose development he had been monitoring throughout 961 and 962. Yet in many ways, this would be characteristic of Taizu's strategic temperament.

Taizu was extremely flexible and fairly patient, preferring to wait for a good opportunity than to force an unfavorable situation. He was also inclined toward short, sharp campaigns that took advantage of strategic surprise and were completed before any of his other opponents could react. This inclination may have been a product of his keen awareness of the threat the Liao dynasty always posed to his northern border, but the political stakes in any campaign were equally important. From the political or military standpoint, Taizu could not afford to lose a campaign in the early years of the Song. It is therefore not surprising that he waited several years before acting militarily, or that he left the most difficult campaigns until later.

For Taizu, there was really no difference between his political and his military power. This was his strength as a ruler, because his frequent successes in each area increased his power in both, but it could also be a weakness, since a failure in either area could also diminish his power in both. War was always a risky business, which he was acutely aware of, but the possible returns were also much greater. Perhaps Zhou Shizong had been so weak politically and militarily that only the greater rewards of military victory would have made a meaningful improvement in his position as emperor. Taizu came to the Song throne with immense military glory to bolster his authority, but he lacked political accomplishments and had to prove his abilities in that area. This also explains much of his efforts within the non-military sphere, which were stressed by later, civil-minded historians. His military acumen and concern went almost without saying, or, at least, required little emphasis. It was his non-military

interests that were in question. But even those incidents that have been held up as signs of his civil bent, for example, his comment that military officials should read more, may not have been very meaningful in that regard.[32]

The civil bias of the historians is particularly severe with respect to Taizu because of the desperate need to distinguish him from the other generals who became emperors in the preceding period. This is a hazardous task, which forces us to make the subtle distinction between someone who may have been simply better at being emperor than his predecessors, and someone who was in some way different from his predecessors. Unless one assumes, as pre-modern Chinese historians did, that the founder of a long-lived dynasty was by definition different from the founder of a short-lived dynasty, it may be impossible to make that distinction. Despite Taizu's caution in moving toward war, he was just as interested in conquest as anyone else in the tenth century.



11. Song Taizu's Chu and Jingnan campaign

The campaign against Chu and Jingnan (1 February – 6 April 963)[33]

The kingdoms of Chu and Jingnan faced each other across the Yangzi River, with Chu on the south side and Jingnan on the north side. Jingnan comprised three prefectures: Xiazhou, Guizhou, and Jingzhou, its capital, 630 miles from Kaifeng. It was a strategic crossroads for all directions.[34] Chu comprised ten prefectures covering most of modern Hunan. Its capital was at Tanzhou (modern Changsha). Although it was small compared to the other Song campaigns, the campaign against Chu and Jingnan demonstrated several interesting aspects of tenth century interstate political life that would be repeated elsewhere. It was also noteworthy for the return of Murong Yanzhao, Taizu's good friend, who had retired from command of the imperial army to become a military governor in 960. Chu and Jingnan were such small kingdoms that it seems surprising that they survived at all in the competitive environment of the tenth century, or that they even contemplated resisting the Song army when it arrived. Yet they did survive and resist, though this was more in theory in the case of Jingnan, even when confronted by a vastly superior military force. This demonstrates that whatever imperial ideology of the "naturalness" of a united Chinese empire might later be applied to the conquest, it did not exist in the minds of tenth century rulers and statesmen of even small kingdoms as an important reason to give up their sovereignty. It was force and force alone that caused the "natural" unification of the empire. Ideology unsupported by force was impotent. This pattern would be repeated again and again as the Song conquest continued. Each court resisted incorporation until its military situation was judged to be untenable.

Given the Song army's overwhelming strength in comparison to Chu and Jingnan, it seems odd that Taizu waited until 963 to conquer them. Murong Yanzhao's return to command may provide part of the

answer to that question. Even in 963, Taizu was still not as firmly in control of the army as he wanted to be, and he needed an absolutely trustworthy and competent commander to run the operation. He was forced to recall one of his old comrades to undertake the task. This argues that Taizu was not really ready to embark upon conquest in 963, but that the political turmoil in Chu and similar weakness in Jingnan was too good an opportunity to pass up. The rulers of both kingdoms were already subordinate to the Song court, receiving their titles and promotions as part of the Song system. After Gao Baorong died, his younger brother Gao Baoxu was promoted to Military Governor of Jingnan on 15 October 961. The Song believed that Gao Baoxu was capable, but also personally licentious and decadent. Taizu could not have been too unhappy that Gao's poor behavior was open enough to offend the people and army.[35]

Chu had been ruled fairly well by Zhou Xingfeng until he fell ill in October of 962. As he lay dying, Zhou Xingfeng warned his generals and officials that Zhang Wenbiao would certainly rebel when he died, leaving only two alternatives. Yang Shifan could suppress him, or, if that failed, they could surrender to the Song. He died, leaving the kingdom in the hands of his eleven-year-old son Baoquan.[36] As predicted, Zhang Wenbiao rebelled and seized control of the capital while Zhou Baoquan and his court officials were taking Xingfeng's body to its tomb.[37] Yang Shipan was then put in charge of suppressing Zhang and messengers were sent to the Song and Southern Tang courts seeking assistance. The Song court demonstrated its political support of Gao Baoquan by appointing him Military Governor of Wuping on 31 December.[38] Meanwhile in Jingnan, Gao Baoxu had died on 19 December 962, leaving his younger brother Jichong in charge.[39]

The political situation was ripe for conquest, and Taizu's reconnaissance report noted that although Jingnan's army was well disciplined, it was only thirty thousand strong. Moreover, life in Jingnan was difficult because of the high taxes required to pay off all

of the surrounding larger countries. Taken together, it would be easy to conquer. Taizu saw a chance to carry out the classic Spring and Autumn period strategy of “borrowing passage” through Jingnan on the way to Chu to seize control of Jingnan as well.

The first Song troops departed on 1 February, ostensibly to put down Zhang Wenbiao in Chu. This would, of course, as Taizu pointed out, require it to pass through Jingnan first. The Song force requested permission for the Song army to pass through Jingnan, and for provisions for the army. Gao Jichong and his advisors were wary of the request, for they were just as familiar with the strategy of “borrowing passage” as Taizu and his officials were. They made a counter-offer to provision the Song army thirty-five miles from their border, but did not give the Song army permission to pass through their country. Li asked again for passage and supplies. Faced with either fighting a hopeless battle against the Song army, or surrendering, Gao dispatched emissaries to present meat and wine to the Song army. Meanwhile, Zhang Wenbiao had been defeated and captured on 23 February, and executed the following day.[40]

The Song army was thirty-five miles from Jiangling on 7 March, where Murong Yanzhao entertained Gao Jichong’s emissaries. While they were so occupied, several thousand Song light cavalry force-marched to Jiangling. When Gao Jicheng heard that an army was outside the city, he could only welcome them. Jingnan’s capture added three prefectures with seventeen counties and a population of 142,300 households to the Song empire.[41]

The bloodless takeover of Jingnan left the Song forces hopeful that Chu would also capitulate without a fight. Like the Jingnan court before it, the Chu court was paralyzed with indecision. Song intentions were clear, as was the likely outcome of resistance, but some members of the court did not want to capitulate. Murong Yanzhao sent an envoy to reassure the Chu government, but no one would meet him. The bridges were cut, the boats all sunk, and downed trees blocked the roads. Taizu sent an ultimatum to Zhou

Baoquan and his generals on 26 March, which was ignored. Murong Yanzhao then launched a multi-pronged assault on Yuezhou. The Song badly defeated the Chu navy at Sanjiangkou, capturing more than seven hundred ships, executing more than four thousand men, and taking Yuezhou.[42]

A Chu army surrendered and scattered in the face of a Song army outside of Lizhou in early April. The Song general Li Chuyun then engaged in a bit of psychological warfare, having several dozen fat prisoners from among the large number of Chu soldiers he had captured divided up and eaten by his troops. Several other prisoners who had witnessed this, were then released and allowed to go to Langzhou. When the people heard that the imperial troops were eating prisoners, they set fire to the city and fled. Zhou Baoquan was soon captured, ending the campaign. Chu added fourteen prefectures containing 97,380 families to the Song.[43]

Just as importantly, the Song now had a foothold on the south side of the Yangzi River. It also controlled the kingdom of Shu's access to the rest of Chinese territory, had a clear route to the Southern Han kingdom, and was another step closer to encircling the Southern Tang. The entire campaign had been carried out with little bloodshed and at minimal cost to the Song. The navy had once again proven useful, even though the exact details of its activities were seldom mentioned. This was an almost ideal campaign from Taizu's point of view, swift and decisive with a minimal cost to him. He was able to focus overwhelming force at the point of contact, taking advantage of political weakness and turmoil to convince one government to surrender, and undermine the other's army's will to fight. Yet having now embarked upon conquest, the question was, where next and when?

The myth of the "south-first" strategy[44]

One of the more curious aspects of the historiography of the Song conquest of China is the repeated reference to a "south first, north later" strategy. Wang Pu's proposal of this "strategy" or plan of conquest during Zhou Shizong's reign (see Chapter 3), should be seen as part this historiographical context.The great continuities between the Zhou and Song have, rightly or wrongly, tended to portray the mid to late tenth century conquest of China as a Zhou–Song conquest. And if most of the personnel, institutions, and impulses were the same, then they must also have pursued a similar plan of conquest. Eleventh and twelfth century historians like Sima Guang or Li Tao, respectively, were attracted to the idea of a "master plan" for two reasons: first, it provided a framework for describing the tenth-century conquest of China, and, second, it explained why the Song dynasty ultimately failed to capture the Sixteen Prefectures from the Liao dynasty.

As we have already seen, however, Zhou Shizong simply ignored Wang Pu's "south-first" strategy in his actual order of campaigns, despite his open endorsement of it. A similar situation obtained in the Song. Of course, neither Li Tao nor Sima Guang intended to simplify the history of the conquest to a pithy phrase; they are, after all, our sources for many of the facts indicating that a "south-first" strategy was not followed, but subsequent scholarship has tended to place inordinate weight on this blueprint for conquest. Taizu's determination upon a "south-first" strategy was written into, or developed, an elaborate myth history around it in much the same way as the coup which founded the Song. This despite clear evidence that he continued to consider northern campaigns his entire reign, and that the order of campaigns he did undertake was not consistent with a "south-first" plan. The most compelling anecdote arguing for a "south-first" strategy is the "Snowy night consultation with [Zhao] Pu,"

where Taizu and Zhao Pu, joined by the future Taizong, decided that the Song would first conquer southern China before turning to the north.[45] Leung Wai Kee, in an outstanding 1999 article, has convincingly dated this meeting to 965 or 966, and argued that Song strategy was, if anything, "north-first." While Mr. Leung favors 965, I believe 966 is more likely.[46]

Mr. Leung's article, drawing upon some excellent recent scholarship, and demonstrating a virtuoso command of the relevant primary sources, has added great nuance to our understanding of the issue. The only substantial flaw in his, and all the other arguments, is the assumption that Taizu had a plan for the conquest of China. That is to say, every previous treatment of the Song conquest has tried to explain what the plan of the conquest was, rather than trying to prove that there was, in fact, some sort of plan. The "south-first" advocates have always had to deal with the problem of Taizu's repeated Northern Han campaigns, essentially arguing their position based upon the pattern of Song military successes, rather than the pattern of Song military efforts. For them, the story of the snowy night consultation with Zhao Pu provided a sort of *locus classicus* for the "south-first" strategy, regardless of the inconsistencies with reality.

Leung Wai Kee's "north-first" argument is more convincing; it fits the facts better, but it too must occasionally assume the presence of a plan to carry the weight of his argument. For example, he argues that Taizu's repeated consultations regarding a campaign against the Northern Han indicate that Taizu had a consistent, pre-existing plan to first reduce the Northern Han. Why then, given that he was always advised against it, did he only sometimes accept that advice? And why did he wait to attack the Southern Tang, when doing so would have served much the same purpose he was supposedly trying to accomplish by destroying the Northern Han, the elimination of the possibility of the north–south coalition against the Song? After all, it was the Southern Tang that had a long-standing diplomatic relationship with the Liao.

A much more plausible, but quite messy, explanation of the course of the Song conquest under Taizu is that there was no plan of any kind. There was certainly a clear goal, to conquer as much territory as possible, but it seems highly unlikely that there was any set sequence of targets. As I have already indicated, the sudden campaign against Chu and Jingnan was really a target of opportunity. Political events presented Taizu with a chance he felt he could not pass up. Taizu's preoccupation with the Northern Han is also quite understandable in this light, as it was the only regime that regularly raided Song territory. The Southern Tang, on the other hand, could safely be ignored because it made no active military moves. A second factor in this haphazard progress of conquest was Taizu's ongoing diplomatic campaign to peacefully win over the surrounding kingdoms. While there was certainly a military aspect to these efforts, they were not entirely disingenuous. Taizu did not engage in diplomacy only to set up his military campaigns, as Mr. Leung rightly asserts he did with the exchange of envoys with the Liao in 974. He used gradual, diplomatic efforts to win over the rulers of other regimes in the same way he attempted to win over power-holders within his own territory. We should be careful not to make too much of the differences in political relationship to the Song court between "domestic" and "foreign" polities. Like any conqueror, Taizu came in peace, which is to say that he preferred everyone peacefully to submit to him. It was not that he shunned violent methods, just that he knew they were more costly and risky.

Taizu's repeated consultations with his advisors on a Northern Han campaign were part of the process of forming the Song empire. This included not only military campaigns, but also political and institutional changes. And just as we would seek in vain for a pre-established, rational, systematic plan to reform the government Taizu took over, so too do all attempts to find a blueprint for military conquest fail. The reason why no plan quite fits the actual campaigns without extensive caveats, is because there was no plan. Although a

blueprint helps the historian to simplify and explain these complex and confusing events, such a plan would have absolutely no value for the actors at the time. A rigid plan of conquest would only have had value if none of the political or military conditions, internal or external, upon which it was based, changed during the course of carrying it out. And even that would only be true if the agreed upon plan had been the product of the considered opinion of the best and brightest minds available, and thus superior to any individual's judgment. Barring the presence of such overwhelming wisdom and a static geopolitical environment, it was much more to Taizu's advantage to be flexible.

Taizu's choice of targets reflected his strategic flexibility. He was confronted with two competing military requirements, one, to capture territory with a minimum of effort, and, two, to defend the stability of his regime. The Northern Han was recognized as the most difficult regime to conquer, but it was also the most active military problem for the Song. Northern Han raids were a serious political problem for Taizu because, as long as they continued, he had to leave considerable military resources in the hands of the incumbent border generals. Taizu's very limited military resources are the final component in explaining the course of the conquest. He simply did not have enough troops or loyal, competent generals available actively to engage more than one major target at a time. His campaigns thus swung between the two poles of expansion and stability. Although conquering the Northern Han would have united those two concerns, and thus held a particular attraction for him, the evaluation that the Northern Han was the most difficult target of all proved absolutely accurate. Because Taizu was flexible, the order of conquered kingdoms unsurprisingly went from easiest to hardest, Jingnan–Chu, Shu, Southern Han, Southern Tang, and, finally under Taizong, Northern Han. Taizu followed the line of least resistance not necessarily because he wanted to, but because he had to. Every time he tried to depart from that order, he failed.

Even so, Taizu's repeated failures to conquer the Northern Han were not entirely useless. Every Northern Han raid was a challenge to his regime that had to be confronted. Whereas the southern kingdoms did not challenge the Song, the Northern Han did, which explains why Taizu personally campaigned against the Northern Han, but left the southern campaigns to his generals. A challenge to his regime was a challenge to him personally, and by campaigning, Taizu reasserted his military qualifications to rule. He could therefore afford to lose militarily, because he still gained politically, and neither his generals nor his troops could accuse him of having gone soft. Of course, this was only true because his other campaigns went well.

The other salutary effect of Taizu's repeated campaigns against the Northern Han was that they gradually wore it down. Whereas the Song was becoming increasingly powerful both economically and militarily, the Northern Han could ill afford the continuing damage to its agriculture or losses of soldiers. The kingdom Taizong faced, and conquered in 979 was not the same one that confronted the Song in 960. In the same vein, Taizu's invasions pushed the Northern Han onto the defensive and diminished its ability to attack the Song. It was a seesaw struggle in which the Song gradually gained the upper hand. Liao assistance kept tipping the battlefield balance in favor of the Northern Han, but it could not fully make up for the collateral destruction suffered throughout Northern Han territory.

The preceding adumbration of the Song conquest, and attack on the idea that there was a blueprint for those campaigns, should focus our attention on the actual events, on the one hand, and on Taizu's decision-making process on the other. At no point did Taizu stop thinking about what he should do next, or ignore emerging opportunities in favor of a pre-established order of attack. This ad hoc approach was not a flaw in his strategic sense, but rather a great strength. A comparison with his approach to governing and bureaucracy is instructive in this regard. By allowing the bureaucracy to remain chaotic, retaining vestigial but impotent structures of the

Tang system, dispersing responsibility over ad hoc agencies, and never clarifying the chain of command within the government, Taizu made himself indispensable to its functioning and prevented any rational accretions of power in the hands of officials. No one had any more power than the emperor had personally seen fit to assign him, and that could always be taken away without even going to the trouble of altering the institutions of government. A rational, systematic government would have legitimized and empowered certain officials in ways that would have constrained the emperor's power. Uncertainty and some degree of inefficiency were to the emperor's benefit. Similarly, uncertainty and flexibility in strategic decision making were also to his benefit. Strategic ambiguity, to borrow a modern term, kept all of his neighbors guessing. In such an uncertain environment, Taizu's possible opponents had an incentive not to provoke him, in the hope that he would not attack them. This left the strategic initiative in his hands and gave him room to maneuver politically, diplomatically, and militarily.

The Northern Han did not complacently cede the strategic initiative to the Song, a stance it was only able to adopt because of Liao military support. Yet although the Liao court actively preserved the Northern Han, it just as consistently chose not to otherwise constrain Song expansion. Considering that Southern Tang diplomatic efforts to unify the kingdoms threatened by the Song failed, despite the obvious utility of such an alliance, we should not be surprised by Liao reticence in this respect. But this would incorrectly characterize the Liao court as failing to act, rather than see it as pursuing a consistent policy, one aspect of which was ambivalence about Song southward expansion. I will discuss this issue more fully in the subsequent chapters on Taizong and Zhenzong. But before taking up Taizu's more extensive campaigns of conquest, it is important to note that I will follow Lau Nap-Yin and Christian Lamouroux's views that after 947, the Liao were not interested in trying to conquer China.[47] As both of them note, not only did the Song not realize this, but also

the Liao actively tried to convince them otherwise. It was to the Liao's advantage in diplomatic negotiations that the Song believed them to be ready, willing, and quite possibly able to conquer China.

The account of Taizu's military and political efforts to create the Song empire which follows in the next two chapters differs substantially from previous accounts in dispensing with the idea that there was a campaign blueprint for that conquest. The first step in dispensing with that plan was the account of Zhou Shizong's campaigns in the two previous chapters, which demonstrated that he did not follow his publicly endorsed "south-first" strategy. The next step was to consider the most recent scholarship dating and discussing the proposal of a similar "south-first" strategy in the early Song. In consideration of the previous wide-spread belief that the plan was proposed in 962/3, this was taken up slightly earlier in the narrative than its actual 965 or 966 date warranted, before, rather than after, the Shu campaign described in the next chapter. In addition to re-dating the strategy proposal, this most recent scholarship convincingly argues that there was no "south-first" plan for unifying the country. Finally, I carried this a step further, agreeing that there was no "south-first" strategy, but disagreeing with the corollary that there must then have been a "north-first" plan, and arguing that there was, in fact, no overall plan for the conquest of China. This should prepare the reader for the next chapter, which describes two swings between north and south, amidst developing political struggles at court.

[1] XCB 1.30; SS 3.49, Sima Guang, *Sushui Jiwen*, 1.5–6.

[2] JWDS 120.1596–7; XCB 1.1; SS 1.3.

[3] ZZTJ 289.9447.

[4] XWDS 10.106; JWDS 103.1376.

[5] XCB 1.8.

[6] All official titles follow Charles Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.

[7] XCB 1.24.

[8] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 142–7.

[9] XCB 1.12.

[10] XCB 1.13.

[11] SS 1.6.

[12] XCB 1.14–18.

[13] XCB 1.19.

[14] XCB 1.21.

[15] XCB 1.21.

[16] XCB 1.22.

[17] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 147–50.

[18] XCB 1.24.

[19] XCB 1.27–8.

[20] XCB 1.28–9.

[21] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 151–2.

[22] Lau Nap-Yin and Huang K’uan-Chung, “Founding and Consolidation of the Sung Dynasty under T’ai-tsu (960–976), T’ai-tsung (976–997), and Chen-tsung (997–1022),” in *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, Vol. 5, Part 1, p. 237.

[23] Nie Chongqi was the first modern historian to point out the significance of “Dissolving Military Power Over a cup of Wine” in his 1948 article, “Lun Song Taizu Shou Bingquan,” originally published in *Yanjing Xuebao* 34, and reprinted in *Songshi Congkao*, Taibei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1986, pp. 263–82, especially pp. 263–71.

[24] Edmund Worthy, “The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976, p. 106.

[25] XCB 2.42.

[26] XCB 2.49–50 and Sima Guang, *Sushui Jiwen*, 1.6–7. The changes were not immediate. It was not until October that Shi Shouxin actually relinquished the title of Commander in Chief of the Imperial Guard, although the title had held little power for some time. In the Palace Corps, Han Chongyun held the number three position of Commander in Chief until 967, but he was a mediocrity and thus no threat to the dynasty. For a chart showing the vacancies in the command structure, see Worthy, “The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions,” p.167.

[27] Xu Gui and Fang Jiaxin have argued that the drinking party did not take place, in contrast to Lau Nap-Yin. Xu and Fang argue that the story of the party was a later simplification of the process of removing central and border generals from positions of power.Their argument is based on several points: the account does not appear in the Veritable Records of Taizu or Zhenzong or in the contemporary National History; it first appears in eleventh-century collected writings; Taizu could not have had a drinking party so soon after the death of his mother; several of the participants could not have been present in the capital at the time; none of the accounts are the same; no date is given; and Sima Guang's account has internal inconsistencies. See Xu Gui and Fang Jianxin, "Beijiu Shi Bingquan Shuoxianyi," *Wenshi*, 14, June 1982, 113–16, and Xu's response to Lau's criticisms in "Zailun Beijiu Shi Bingquan," Proceedings of the Second Symposium on Sung History, Taibei: Chinese Culture University, 1995, pp. 401–12. Lau's criticism of the original article is reasonable and not very effectively rebutted in Xu's response. See Lau Nap-Yin, "Beijiu Shi Bingquan Xinshuo Zhiyi," *Songshi Yanjiu Ji*, 22, March 1992, 1–20.

[28] XCB 2.38–9.

[29] XCB 2.41.

[30] XCB 2.45.

[31] XCB 3.74.

[32] XCB 3.62.

[33] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 156–60.

[34] See Wang Gungwu's essay, "The Middle Yangtze in T'ang Politics," in Perspectives on the T'ang, edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973, 193–235.

[35] XCB 2.53–4.

[36] XCB 3.72.

[37] XCB 3.73.

[38] XCB 3.76.

[39] XCB 3.75.

[40] XCB 3.77; 4.82; 4.84–5. I have tried to make sense of the order of events by presenting Zhang Wenbiao's capture and execution after Gao's discussion with his advisors. Even though the discussion is listed under 1 March, the two references to Zhang indicate that he was still at large when it took place. It must have occurred before 23–24 February when Zhang's death is recorded. Given the distances involved and the importance of Zhang to the events, I think it unlikely that the news of his public execution in the market would have taken more than five days to reach the Jingnan court.

[41] XCB 4.85.

[42] XCB 4.85–6.

[43] XCB 4.86–7.

[44] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 153–55.

[45] XCB 9.204–5.

[46] Leung Wai Kee, “Xian Nan Zheng, Hou Bei Fa: Songchu Tongyi Quanguo de Weiyi Zhanlue (960–976)?” *Journal of Chinese Studies*, 1999/8, 73–100. The anecdote was first recorded in Shao Bowen’s *Jianwen Lu*, compiled in 1132. Edmund Worthy characterized the debate as between a 962/963 date and a 968 date. Li Tao argued for the former, placing the story, with important modifications, in the summer of 968 as a flashback demonstrating, “that contrary to the ‘south first’ strategy worked out and agreed upon early in the dynasty, Taizu launched an attack against the Northern Han before all the south was pacified.” Worthy, p. 90. In contrast, Shao Bowen and Bi Yuan (1730–1797), the editor of the *Xu Zizhi Tongjian*, place the story in 968.

[47] Lau Nap-Yin, “Waging War for Peace? The Peace Accord Between the Song and the Liao in AD 1005,” in Warfare in Chinese History, edited by Hans Van de Ven, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 180–221; Christian Lamouroux, “Geography and Politics: The Song-Liao Border Dispute of 1074/75,” in China and Her Neighbors: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy 10th to 19th Centuries, edited by Roderich Ptak and Sabine Dabringhaus, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, pp. 1–28.

6

Personal politics and the campaigns of conquest

The conquest of Chu and Jingnan in 963 proved to be only the beginning of an intense period of campaigning for the Song army. At the end of July, it launched an escalating series of raids on the Northern Han that culminated in a massive battle involving more than 120,000 troops near Liaozhou the following year. The Song won, and although intermittent Northern Han raiding continued, large-scale military activity temporarily abated. In December of 964, Taizu turned his attention to Shu, directing a lightning campaign to overrun that kingdom in the middle of winter. It was a strategically and tactically brilliant campaign, which achieved its objective in two months. But, after its initial success, the situation deteriorated into a drawn out suppression effort that was only resolved in 967.Taizu returned to the Northern Han problem in 968, this time personally taking the field. Despite wreaking tremendous destruction on the Northern Han, and laying siege to Taiyuan for four months, Taizu was forced to withdraw his enervated army the following year without achieving his goal. In 970, it was the Southern Han's turn. It fell the following year, bringing the middle period of the Song conquest to a close. The battered, but still surviving Northern Han regime remained in place supported by the Liao, and only the Southern Tang remained in the south.

Some part of the Song army was actively engaged every year from 963 to 971, but launching armies of tens of thousands of men, year in year out, does not appear to have strained Song resources. This is

quite remarkable considering the pre-modern economy and supply system. More remarkable still, the Song army appears to have grown in power during this period, as measured in both numbers and efficiency. Where Taizu intentionally ignored bureaucratic discipline, he continued to spend considerable attention on strengthening the military chain of command and enforcement of regulations. Indeed, this was so important to him that he moved too rapidly on the latter front during the conquest of Shu and incited a mutiny. That misstep cost him a two-year delay in campaigning, and weakened the military posture of the entire dynasty while it continued. In that respect, it was clear that bureaucratic concerns placed a distant second to military matters. Military problems endangered the existence of the dynasty and had to be addressed immediately.

As the empire expanded and power was increasingly concentrated at the center, however, the political battle for shares of that expanding pie intensified. There were three principal players in that struggle, Taizu, his younger brother Kuangyi, and Zhao Pu. It was obviously not a simple struggle between the three of them, since it was always in the interests of Kuangyi and Zhao Pu to enhance Taizu's power, which was the source of their power. Taizu was similarly constrained by his interest in, on the one hand, balancing out Kuangyi and Zhao Pu's power between the two of them and among the other power-holders, and on the other, in enhancing the strength of these two loyal bulwarks of his own power. The struggle between Kuangyi and Zhao Pu during Taizu's reign was played out in a variety of bureaucratic struggles, conveniently laid out by Jiang Fucong.[1] These fragmentary indicators of the ongoing political battles were a tiny portion of what must have been a wide-ranging political war. Since the political war was linked to the army and its campaigns, I have treated it diachronically, placing the events within the larger chronological narrative of the Song conquest, rather than setting it apart and treating it synchronically. Although this approach emphasizes the connection between war and politics during Taizu's reign, it also

makes the political aspect, which was far more subtle and complicated than the purely military aspect, harder to encompass. Consequently, some discussion of the ground rules of that contest for power is warranted, along with a general adumbration of its outcome and consequences.

While Taizu's political power was virtually synonymous with his military power, the same was not true for his younger brother, Kuangyi, and Zhao Pu. Indeed, military power would not substantially impact Kuangyi's political fortunes until he became emperor. This was true even though he spent considerable effort in gaining influence over important generals and military units, and held important army positions at various times. Kuangyi's power in those cases was mostly political, particularly once he no longer held an army position, since it was not dependent upon martial accomplishments. That is to say, he did not gain power or lose power because of military actions, but only because of his political fortunes. Zhao Pu, for his part, was an entirely political creature, whose credibility was based upon his loyalty, his administrative competence, and the quality of his advice. To the extent that his military plans succeeded, and his advice was good, he gained a measure of political power through military means. Both men's political dependency was repeatedly demonstrated in their promotions along with several others, most notably Taizu and Kuangyi's younger brother, Guangmei (also known as Tingmei), and, later, Taizu's sons.They were not individually rewarded for particular actions, only promoted as part of larger acts of favor. As such, they were the foremost members of the Song regime after the emperor, but represented no constituency, such as the army, within that system. Loyalty was their strength, but also their weakness, as they were wholly dependent upon the emperor.

The unspoken rules of the contest apparently precluded physical violence against the principals, something that would actually become characteristic of Song imperial politics As we shall see, this did not preclude violence or death for some of the pawns, but it did allow a

certain amount of civility in the contest. The instruments of power, or the territories to be captured, were positions within the government and military. These positions were taken and lost based upon job performance and the perception of job performance. Since the civil service exam system was only barely functional during Taizu's reign, positions were usually filled by recommendation. In effect, Kuangyi and Zhao Pu headed two warring patronage networks that also carried out the tasks of administering the empire. This also constrained the two men, for they could not recommend incompetent men to administrative positions and expect them to remain there. Indeed, recommending someone who was incompetent would injure one's standing with the emperor. Hence, they constantly sought to acquire competent, loyal men to patronize. But the greatest limit on their actions was Taizu himself, who was aware, and suspicious of, everyone else's accretions of power. Every move to gain more power tended to make one appear disloyal, and ran the risk of dismissal or demotion. And it was not as if Taizu was the only person aware of their struggle. When Zhao Pu died in 992, Kuangyi, who was then emperor, commented about their differences that, "Everyone knew about it."[2]

That Kuangyi became emperor after Taizu is proof enough that he won the contest with Zhao Pu, but, as I will show in Chapter 8, his political victory was actually the prerequisite for that succession. Kuangyi's ascension to the throne also demonstrates how different the stakes the men were playing for could be, for Kuangyi could imagine becoming emperor as Zhao Pu could not. Both men were playing for power during Taizu's reign, but both also had their eyes on the future as well. No Northern Song emperor ever named his heir without strenuous, repeated prompting by his officials. The politically strongest, like Taizu, never named an heir at all. Naming an heir created a new focus for loyalty, something emperors were at pains to avoid. Zhao Pu was loyal to Taizu, and through him to the Song dynasty that he embodied. He was Taizu's personal retainer, and

perhaps the imperial Zhao family's, but the latter loyalty was really too abstract. As the dynasty became more stable and institutionalized, and thus less embodied in the immediate person of Taizu, it became possible to separate loyalty to the dynasty and emperor from loyalty to a particular individual. Taizu's unwillingness to name an heir was clearly part of an effort to continue to tie loyalty to himself personally, rather than allowing it to extend toward the dynasty as an institution. This created an opening for Kuangyi, who would have been severely disadvantaged in his quest to be emperor had Taizu named one of his own sons heir-apparent.

During Taizu's reign there was very little Kuangyi could do to prevent the elevation of his nephews and younger brother to high rank. All of them were threats to his ambition, and all would, not surprisingly, die within a few years of his ascension. But Zhao Pu not only remained alive, he was actually brought back into government for a brief period. He returned to bolster Kuangyi's legitimacy, as he was uniquely capable of doing, serving the man who had pushed him out of power in the first place. This was ultimately a longstanding political struggle and a longstanding political relationship played out against a backdrop of loyalties and goals that frequently converged.

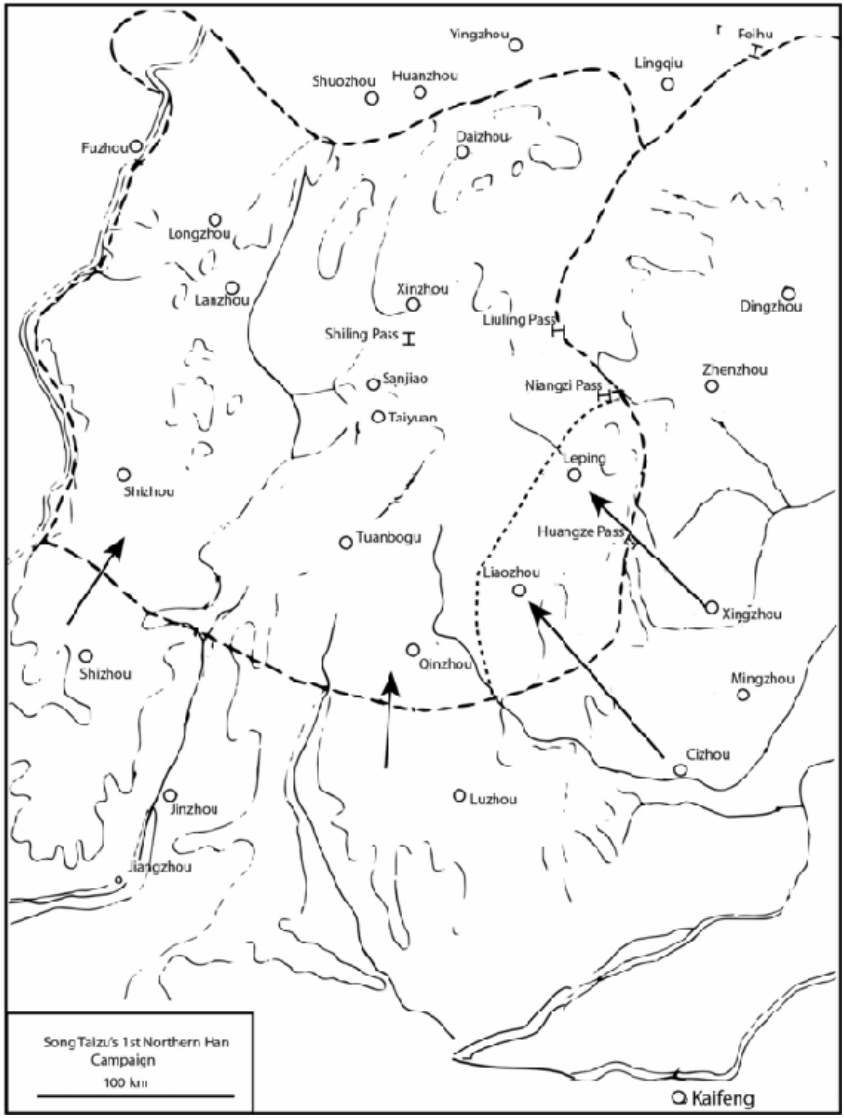
The intensely personal nature of the political struggle was clear from the beginning. In 963, Taizu decided to place Fu Yanqing in a military command despite Zhao Pu's repeated and strenuous objections to it. Zhao intercepted the edict of appointment, rather than allow it to go out, and requested an audience with Taizu. After reassuring the emperor that he was not there to discuss the Fu Yanqing appointment, and first discussing other matters, he then produced the edict of appointment. Taizu felt that this was going too far, and that Zhao Pu's suspicions regarding Fu were unwarranted, "Why do you so bitterly suspect Yanqing? We have treated Yanqing generously, how would Yanqing be able to be ungrateful to Us?" "How was Your Majesty able to be ungrateful to Zhou Shizong?" Zhao Pu replied, effectively ending the matter.[3] Seen in the light of Taizu's

policy of diminishing the power of individual generals and military governors, his interest in placing Fu in a significant military post is indeed, as Edmund Worthy noted, perplexing. Seen, however, in light of the fact that Fu was Kuangyi's father-in-law, and that Kuangyi had just been moved from his post as Provost Marshal of the Palace Corps to Governor of Kaifeng, it becomes more understandable. Kuangyi was trying to insert someone loyal to himself into the military command structure in order to continue his influence there. Zhao Pu acted to block Kuangyi's extension of influence.

Jiang Fucong is no doubt correct in explaining this incident as part of the Kuangyi–Zhao Pu political struggle, but, given the indirect means Zhao used to block Kuangyi's efforts, it also highlights the difficulties of trying to understand the deeper meaning of many anecdotes. Edmund Worthy was right to find Taizu's willingness to employ Fu Yanqing inconsistent with his general institutional personnel policies.[4] But other concerns that might conflict with those policies also intruded into the process of creating a stable regime. Taizu still had to fill various vacant posts in his government and army, and he mainly did so through recommendation. This necessarily created patronage networks that diminished his personal authority because loyalty to the throne was mediated through the recommender. Although Taizu was certainly aware of this problem, Zhao Pu apparently could not argue that Fu Yanqing should not be employed because he was part of Kuangyi's network. Zhao was forced, rather, to argue that Fu might be disloyal, despite whatever good treatment he had received, and so should not be placed in a critical military command. Taizu's greatest fear, and the problem he was most concerned to avoid, was the possibility of a disloyal general. Paradoxically, this problem became more acute after he convinced his loyal comrades to leave their positions to secure his throne. He had moved his most loyal supporters into reserve positions in order to create a larger gap between the emperor and the top of the military hierarchy. Generals who advanced during the subsequent campaigns

of conquest would fill that gap.

The second wave of generals and officials moved into their positions through different means, but there was still a great deal of overlap in their responsibilities. On one occasion, when Taizu was looking for officials capable of “great matters,” the non-soldier recommended by Zhao Pu assured the emperor that he had worn armor and gone on campaign. On another occasion, the emperor commented that his military officials should read more. Coming from a man who did not imagine that the civil exam system could become a major recruiting tool, it is clear that Taizu was a man most concerned with military affairs. He wanted to improve the capabilities of military men rather than simply replace them with non-soldiers. This is significant not just because his intention to control the military has often been mistaken for intentions to demilitarize his regime, but also because it explains why the political field was left open to Kuangyi and Zhao Pu. While Taizu was trying to conquer an empire and control the military, Kuangyi was fighting for political control of the regime Both succeeded, though Kuangyi would run into serious difficulties when he became emperor and tried to take control over the military.



12. Song Taizu's first Northern Han campaign

The military and the government tracks began to converge as leading generals were promoted not to the highest ranks of the army, but into the highest ranks of the Bureau of Military Affairs. This turned potentially threatening men into bureaucrats removed from the active command of troops. They were thus amply rewarded and defanged at the same time. The first generals who would really experience this bureaucratization became prominent Song commanders in the process of creating the empire. They rose to power

through war, gaining rank and marriage with the imperial family, before a fully developed civil bureaucracy existed to restrain those advances. As we turn to the campaigns themselves, the careers of two men in particular, Wang Quanbin and Cao Bin, stand out as prime examples of the political ramifications of the fortunes of war on power, rank, and privilege.

The first campaign against the Northern Han (30 July 963–16 March 964)[5]

A successful Song raid on Northern Han territory on 30 July 963 captured several thousand prisoners. Soon after that, a group of middle-ranked Northern Han officials rebelled against their ruler. Although the rebellion was put down by 21 August, it encouraged the Song. A more sustained Song offensive began on 29 August, with an attack on Leping county, whose military commander almost immediately surrendered with eighteen hundred troops. A Northern Han relief army was repeatedly leaving the county in Song hands. This caused a cascade effect, prompting eighteen Northern Han forts to surrender to the Song by 7 September. A half-hearted Liao attack to relieve pressure on the Northern Han fell back before a Song reaction force.[6]

The Liao withdrawal was curious, indicating a softening of support for their client. Whether intuitively, or based upon hard intelligence, Taizu sensed an opportunity to attack an unexpectedly politically isolated Northern Han, and on 15 December ordered further raiding. Even without Liao support, this uncoordinated attack proved ineffective, and the Song generals withdrew to regroup. Random raiding was ineffective as a serious invasion strategy. A new plan was formulated, and on 14 January, two separate forces were sent to capture the Jin and Lu prefectural seats, while a third force pinned down Northern Han troops in the Liao and Shi prefecture area.[7] Given the ongoing campaign, it is not surprising that Wang Ming submitted *zhentu*[8] to the emperor on 24 January, proposing that the Song attack Youzhou, the key to the Sixteen Prefectures. Taizu rewarded him but took no further action.[9] Wang Ming had clearly misunderstood the geopolitical situation that made the Northern Han campaign attractive to the emperor at that time. Taizu was trying to destroy the Han while the Liao were not as likely to get involved. An

attack on the Sixteen Prefectures would guarantee a larger war with the Liao. Even so, it was rumored that Taizu would personally go on campaign in the north.

In the midst of the Song onslaught, the Northern Han ruler received a letter from the Liao emperor on 14 February that shook him to the core. The Liao emperor expressed his general displeasure with the Han ruler. The Han ruler's father had been much more tractable, and consulted with the Liao before acting. The present ruler acted more independently. The Liao emperor was also unhappy with the results of the Northern Han involvement with Li Yun. The Northern Han ruler immediately sent back several envoys to patch up the rift.[10] The Liao emperor had played the situation well, timing his remonstrance for maximum effect. Now under dire threat from the Song, the Northern Han ruler had no choice but to get back into line.

Having satisfied his requirements, Liao support was quickly forthcoming when the Song attacked Liaozhou in early 964. A Song force had crushed a Northern Han relief army in front of the city, forcing its defenders to surrender. The Song force was not in possession of the city for long when a combined Liao–Northern Han army of sixty thousand infantry and cavalry approached, forcing them to withdraw. They regrouped, brought up Song reinforcements, and with a combined force of sixty thousand troops inflicted a severe defeat on the Liao–Northern Han army before Liaozhou on 16 March.[11] Even after this great victory, however, the Song army failed to relieve Pingjinjun.

The defeat of the Northern Han–Liao army resolved the status of Liaozhou for the next two years, but it by no means put an end to border skirmishing. With the Liao now more fully committed to their client, the prospects for a relatively easy victory over the Northern Han had evaporated. Liao aid had effectively curtailed the Song effort, despite the Song victory at Liaozhou. The Northern Han had shored up its security by reconnecting with the Liao court, but it had suffered serious damage from the Song assaults. Thus, all three sides lost and

gained on either the strategic or tactical level, resulting in a stalemate. But the equilibrium the Liao had acted to restore was not quite the status quo antebellum. The Northern Han had been pushed back, and the Liao army had been defeated in the field. As yet, the Liao had only acted to stabilize the Song–Northern Han situation; it had not attempted either to roll back Song gains, or destabilize or diminish, let alone destroy, the Song. This would be a consistent Liao policy until Song Taizong directly attacked Liao territory in 979.

The Liao generally reacted to Song moves, as they did when they disrupted Song attempts to fortify Yijin Pass on 9 February 963; they did not proactively engage the Song to contain its expansion.[12] This was done partly to leave open the possibility of peaceful coexistence, and partly because of a shortsighted reluctance to re-engage the Central Plains of China militarily after the hasty retreat of the Liao army in 947. The Liao had already passed up opportunities to maintain a power balance within the boundaries of the former Tang empire by joining with the Southern Tang to restrain the Later Zhou. It would not have taken great wisdom to have recognized that a large, consolidated empire south of its territory would ultimately be a threat to the Liao empire. In many respects then, Song Taizu's freedom to operate, to pick and choose the sequence and progress of his campaigns, and thus to create the Song empire, was possible because of a Liao policy failure. Unwilling or unable to formulate a broader diplomatic and military policy beyond merely trying to stabilize its southern border, the Liao court created one of the necessary preconditions for Taizu's successful enterprise. Since it was Liao policy to maintain a peaceful southern border, Taizu had no incentive not to keep trying to destroy the Northern Han. If he succeeded, he would destroy the only aggressive power on his border, and if he failed, the border would simply return to the way it was. Of course, he was never sure that the Liao would not invade while the Song army was otherwise occupied, or that attempts to destroy the Northern Han would not provoke a large-scale Liao counter-attack.

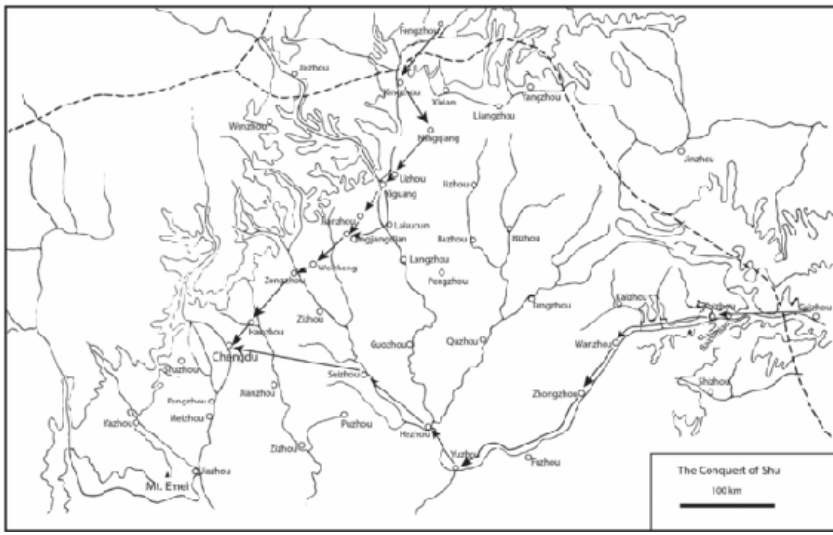
The Liao court's passive response during the Later Zhou and early Song is puzzling. Both the short- and long-term Liao military and political policies are at the heart of the political, military, and institutional history of this period. Yet our picture of Liao motivations and thinking is limited. In the case of the passive Liao policy toward the Zhou and early Song dynasties, the only answer supported by our sources is that Liao emperor Muzong (951–968) was, in fact, a lazy, murderous drunk, unconcerned with attending to affairs of state. The *Liaoshi* and *Qidan Guozhi* note repeated occasions of multi-day drinking sprees, ordering the deaths of, and sometimes personally killing, courtiers and officials, and not holding court while hunting.[13] Yet none of these characteristics, even if substantially borne out in reality, would necessarily have made Muzong a poor emperor, even with respect to foreign policy. History is filled with many men and women like him who were perfectly capable of setting, if not carrying out, rational (however defined) policy. But in the case of the Liao until 968, it does appear that their anemic response to Song military actions was the result of indecision at the center. Muzong did not take the field himself, as Liao emperor Shengzong would repeatedly from the 990s until 1005. His two largest mobilizations, in 954 and 964, turned out poorly, and he was unable to pursue a political policy vis-a-vis the Song by opening diplomatic relations. Official Song–Liao diplomatic relations would have to wait for his successor, demonstrating, perhaps, that Song Taizu's delay in opening diplomacy with the Liao court was due to awareness on his part that Muzong would not have been a credible or functional interlocutor. War and politics were not unilateral operations.

While the northern border remained tense through 964, political activities continued apace. Significantly, important promotions at the top of the government extended beyond Zhao Pu and Kuangyi. Both Guangmei, Taizu and Kuangyi's younger brother (also referred to as Tingmei), and Taizu's seveneteen-year-old son, Dezhao, were also promoted. Indeed, Kuangyi and Guangmei were almost always

promoted together, with Kuangyi as the older brother receiving slight precedence. Kuangyi retained the important post of Governor of Kaifeng Metropolitan Prefecture, as well as Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery, and Secretariat Director; Guangmei was Military Governor of Shannan West Route, and Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery. Dezhao was given the relatively minor appointment of Defense Commissioner of Guizhou, rather than being enfeoffed as a King, in order to keep him humble.[14] These appointments within the imperial family displayed no particular favoritism, and reflect the different ages and positions within the family rather than indicating who should succeed Taizu.

Outside of the imperial family, Zhao Pu's unsurpassed position among officials was undergoing some revision. He remained the most powerful official in the regime, even adding Director of the Chancellery, Manager of Affairs (an abbreviation of the title Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery), Grand Academician of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies, and Commissioner of the Court of Palace Attendants, to his existing title of Military Affairs Commissioner in 964. His good friend Li Chongju, was also promoted, though Taizu was concerned that he still had no official Grand Councilor. Taizu ultimately accepted the position that Kuangyi was effectively serving as Grand Councilor in his capacity as Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery.[15] These layers of titles partly reflected Zhao Pu's proximity to the emperor, and partly reflected the still-fluid institutional reality of the Song bureaucracy in 964. That is to say, Zhao Pu was probably much closer to Taizu than could be readily accommodated within a governmental structure that had only limited means for acknowledging a long-standing personal tie between the emperor and any official. At the same time, Taizu was concerned to give the government at least the appearance of having a balance of power amongst its officials. He therefore created the position of Participant in Determining Governmental Matters, and promoted both Xue Juzheng and Lu

Yuqing to that position. Almost no power went with the position, however, and it seems that the emperor was more concerned at this time to begin the process of bringing up a second rank of high ministers than to diminish Zhao Pu's powers.[16] A parallel may be seen in the new generals who were advancing in the military hierarchy to take the place of Taizu's departed comrades.



13. Song Taizu's Shu campaign

This brief excursion into the confusing list of names and positions that occupied the political landscape in 964 is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that Taizu's closest family members, his two younger brothers and his eldest son, all maintained positions in the government commensurate with their positions within the family, with Dezhao being specifically held back from the more expected enfeoffment which would have elevated him above his uncles in status. This was done not to punish Dezhao, but to temper him. Second, it shows the parallels between the political and military spheres as Taizu strove to bridge the personnel gaps caused by the lack of reliably loyal and competent officials in the early Song, a problem that would occupy Taizu through his entire reign. In order to create a lasting regime, he had to make sure it was based upon a

functioning government, rather than dependent upon particular individuals. This requirement would frequently clash with his need to make himself indispensable and to ensure that the army and the government were run by men directly loyal to him. The result of these sorts of clashes was somewhat contradictory. In the case of creating the Participant in Determining Governmental Matters position, he advanced two men and filled a yawning gap between Zhao Pu and the rest of the government, without radically shifting the balance of power. As we shall see in the aftermath of the conquest of Shu, he was faced with a similar clash of interests, and arrived at a similarly contradictory solution.

The Song campaign against Shu (8 December 964–11 February 965)[17]

In the first week of December 964, two couriers from the ruler of Shu arrived at the court of Song Taizu. The secret message they carried was not, however, meant for Taizu. Rather, it was a proposal to the ruler of the Northern Han for a joint attack on the Song. In addition to a *casus belli*, the two couriers also provided Taizu with intelligence of the terrain and defenses that an invader would have to overcome. Taizu immediately assembled an invasion force of sixty thousand infantry and cavalry, divided into two columns. One would attack from the north and one from the east, up the Yangzi River. The speed with which he was able to assemble these two forces, and their commanders, strongly suggests that he had already prepared them for further action against the Northern Han when the messengers from Shu reached him. The number of troops, sixty thousand, is also strikingly similar to the size of the force that fought the Northern Han–Liao army at Liaozhou earlier in the year.[18] In all likelihood, then, Taizu had been preparing either to invade the Northern Han again, or to defend against a joint Northern Han–Liao invasion of the Song.

But the Shu couriers had done more than provide Taizu with military intelligence, they had, by their presence in his court rather than that of the Northern Han ruler's, made it clear that the kingdom of Shu was politically isolated. It had been seeking to arrange a joint attack, but it had not yet done so. Thus, like the Northern Han earlier in the year, Shu was a target that might be picked off before any other power could react. Indeed, it was now critical that Taizu act before Shu and the Northern Han could form some kind of alliance. He had the forces necessary at hand to attack one of them, but he could not attack them both simultaneously. Military logic required the maximum concentration of force against an individual target in order

to overwhelm it quickly. The Northern Han was almost certainly the more difficult target. It had proven a tough opponent even without Liao help, and now that Northern Han–Liao relations were once again close, it would be even harder to destroy. Shu would likely be easier, although the two restricted routes into it, over the trestle roads through the mountains from the north and up the Yangzi River from the east, seemed to provide formidable natural defenses. Under the circumstances, despite the natural obstacles, Taizu decided his best chance was to risk a winter campaign against Shu.

Taizu's decision was an act of sheer strategic brilliance, carried out with tactical virtuosity by his generals. He had waited throughout 964 to see what the Northern Han and Liao would do. By December, he knew that they were not mobilizing for a major invasion. He therefore had a brief moment in which to throw his sole striking force against Shu while his other enemies were quiescent. A sudden winter campaign would catch all of his enemies, Shu, the Northern Han, and the Liao, off-guard. By the time the Liao, Song's most powerful enemy, became aware of the campaign, the onset of winter would have prevented a major mobilization. The Liao preferred to campaign in the autumn, when their horses were in the best shape after grazing through the spring and summer. They would not be prepared for a major campaign until at least the summer. And, as he knew from the envoys, Shu was not prepared for an invasion.

On 8 December 964, Taizu made his command dispositions for two forces, one going up the Yangzi River, and one taking the roads from the north. Publicly, he announced that anyone burning houses, bothering the people, or digging up graves during the invasion would be subject to military law (which was harsher than civilian law), and a large mansion was prepared for the Shu ruler near Kaifeng.The following day, Taizu feasted the army and its commanders. After distributing gifts and presenting the generals with the campaign plan, the emperor told them: "The weapons, armor, fodder and provisions that you find in all the cities and forts that you capture must be

registered. The money and cloth should be shared among all the troops. What I want is the land."[19] He thus made a private contract with his officers which somewhat contradicted his public proclamation that the people would not be bothered.

The Yangzi front

The Yangzi column went into action at the beginning of February 975, seizing control of a series of Shu forts and the pontoon bridge at Lajiang. The combined land and naval force repeatedly drove back the Shu navy and army, killing or capturing some twelve thousand Shu sailors and soldiers, and taking two hundred warships. The Shu army then reinforced Baidimiao, farther upstream.[20] One Shu commander sallied from the city and was quickly defeated. Song troops immediately followed up, scaling Baidimiao's walls and capturing the city.[21] The Yangzi force continued its invasion without significant opposition, reaching Kui prefecture before it got word that the Shu ruler had surrendered to the other Song army. Liu Guangyi, the commander of the Yangzi force, distributed all of the money and silk in the local government treasuries to his soldiers, and then gave, or allowed, the generals and soldiers free rein to pillage and exploit the populace. Only Cao Bin, one of the subordinate commanders, prevented his men from doing so.[22] Cao's discipline would later result in him being put in command of the Song campaign against the Southern Tang (Chapter 7) and his rise to such prominence that his family made strong marriage ties to the imperial family.

The Northern front

The Northern force's commander, Wang Quanbin's, first task was to secure his line of communication to Jianmen, the key defense position protecting Shu. In order to do this, beginning on 24 January 965, he systematically reduced the screen of Shu forts defending the approaches to Jianmen, steadily driving the Shu army back. He captured significant amounts of military provisions as he advanced, some four hundred thousand piculs after capturing Xing prefecture alone, and a further three hundred thousand piculs after scattering a Shu army at the Xi county seat. As the Shu troops retreated, they destroyed the rope bridges and wooden roads connecting the precipitous routes into the mountains. This only briefly delayed the main Song army, as small advance units rapidly secured and repaired the roads.

After a series of Song victories, Wang Quanbin entered Li prefecture on 4 February, taking possession of eight hundred thousand piculs of military provisions left behind by the Shu army.[23] Shu troops continued to fall back to Jianmen. At a council of war, Wang Quanbin brought up the problem of the strength of the position at Jianmen, a position long known for its difficulty of egress. Fortunately, a Shu soldier who had surrendered knew a route around the mountains to the rear of Jianmen. A small Song force took this precipitous route, drove off a Shu unit guarding a river crossing, and attacked Jianmen from the rear. A simultaneous attack from the front by the main Song army shocked the Shu army, which abandoned the position. Wang Quanbin then captured Jian prefecture and killed more than ten thousand Shu soldiers. The Shu ruler surrendered shortly afterward.[24] The campaign had taken sixty-six days (counting from when the Song generals left Kaifeng), and brought forty-six prefectures, containing two hundred and forty counties and 534,290 households into the Song empire.

Wang and his men entered Chengdu, the Shu capital, on 1 March 965. Liu Guangyi‘s Yangzi army arrived several days later. For the moment, it seemed that Taizu’s gamble had paid off. The Song army had conquered Shu in a remarkably short period of time, campaigning in the dead of winter over formidable natural obstacles. It had brushed aside the Shu army with remarkable ease. But now it would manifest the darker side of a force raised and trained during the Five Dynasties.

Trouble in Chengdu

Both Song armies occupied Chengdu, but the end of the war was only the beginning of the misfortunes of the city's inhabitants. Although Cao Bin repeatedly argued that the army should return to Kaifeng, the other generals were intent upon exploiting the populace while they had the chance. To further exacerbate the chaos in the city, there was no unified command structure to control the army. All decisions were supposed to be agreed upon by all the generals together. Since they could not agree upon anything, and most were more interested in feasting anyway, even small matters could not be resolved. The only thing the generals successfully accomplished was sending the Shu ruler back to Kaifeng.[25]

The breakdown in order in Sichuan soon turned from a minor problem into a major rebellion. Although two Song civil administrators had some success in Chengdu and Zizhou in establishing order, the general situation was deteriorating. The Song army outside of Chengdu was still mistreating the common people, and large numbers of nominally demobilized Shu soldiers were still at large. These men, like all of the Five Dynasties period troops, were professional soldiers who had no occupation to turn to now that the war was over. Their prospects in the wake of the Song conquest were limited, with perhaps the best that they could hope for being incorporation into the Song army. For the moment, however, they appear to have been left to their own devices while the victorious Song soldiers plundered Shu. Matters came to a head when a group of Shu soldiers rebelled and plundered a county in Mian prefecture. This force soon compelled the former Shu prefect of Wenzhou, Quan Shixiong, who had been a general in the past, to lead them. The rebel army, now calling itself the "Resurgent State Army," numbered more than ten thousand men.

After several crushing defeats at the hands of the Song regular

army, the resilient Quan succeeded in capturing Peng prefecture. Shu soldiers in the ten counties around Chengdu all then threw off Song rule in response. Now calling himself the “Great King of Resurgent Shu,” Quan started his own government and dispatched men to govern the rebellious counties now under his control. A subsequent Song attempt to bring Quan to heel failed, and Quan spread the rebellion south, setting up forts along the Yangzi and announcing that he intended to attack Chengdu. He controlled seventeen prefectures at that point, and the mail from Kaifeng to Chengdu did not go through for more than a month. Wang Quanbin and his fellow officers feared that they were now trapped in Chengdu. They were particularly worried that the thirty thousand surrendered Shu soldiers camped on the drill field to the south of the city would respond to the rebellion. In order to remove the possibility that they would be caught between the rebels outside the city and the soldiers inside the city, on 4 May, Wang ordered the slaughter of twenty-seven thousand Shu soldiers in the city.[26]

Meanwhile, Taizu was beginning to respond to reports of his army’s mistreatment of the people of Sichuan. Overriding the concerns of his officials, he ordered an end to such practices and the beheading of the perpetrators in the capital. Taizu’s humanitarian impulses proved ill timed, and at odds with the expectation of the Song army in Sichuan.His effort to clean up his army’s behavior would add mutiny to the rebellion he was already facing, just as the tide was turning against Quan Shixiong. Two serious defeats destroyed the rebel field army and forced Quan on the defensive. His remaining troops dispersed to defend the prefectures and counties still in rebel hands.

Unfortunately, part of the Song army then mutinied at Jiazhou in the late summer or early fall.[27] The origin of the mutiny was nominally personal, but the mutineers joined up with one of Quan Shixiong’s generals and took control of Puzhou with their combined force of fifty thousand men. The sudden mutiny among the troops whose actions had prompted Song Taizu to impose stricter discipline

makes it most likely that their actions were the result of the new restrictions. It was a serious, and rare, misstep for Taizu in the management of his troops. More than a quarter of Sichuan was still in rebel hands.

Jiazhou was quickly recaptured, with tens of thousands of mutineers and rebels killed in the process, but without capturing the upper leadership. Tens of thousands of rebels were still free, and it took a gradual process of building forts to control the mountain passes and restrict rebel movements, accompanied by hunting down individual groups, to bring the situation under control.[28] Even so, other bands of rebel troops loyal to Quan Shixiong were still functioning in 966, particularly in the West River area where Song troops had mutinied.[29]

The mutiny itself was apparently now under control. Twenty-seven of the leaders were sent to Kaifeng where Taizu personally examined their cases and found them all guilty. They were then dismembered outside of the various gates on 17 October 965, with one of them found to be so cruel that his entire clan was also executed. Taizu was reluctant, however, to mete out such severe penalties on the rank and file mutineers, feeling that many had been carried along against their will. They would have had to execute more than ten thousand men if they included the rank and file, an indication of how widespread the mutiny had been. Taizu pardoned the rank and file soldiers rather than resort to such large-scale blood letting.[30] In any case, the rebellion was effectively over, more than twenty months after the Shu ruler had capitulated.

Aftermath

Wang Quanbin knew that the final pacification of Shu was not an unalloyed success. Yet he did not assume that it was in any way a failure, or that any of his actions in and of themselves warranted punishment. He was concerned, however, that people at court were attacking him and damaging the positive reputation that he believed his victories had created. Clearly, he did not associate his troops' cruelty with the subsequent rebellion or, if he did, believed both cause and effect were unfortunate but natural parts of war. The mutiny of the Song soldiers also probably did not seem to him to be his fault, coming as a result either of Taizu's new discipline or personal animosities in the lower ranks. Wang's concern was how his actions were understood at court. He was well aware that generals on campaign were often slandered. Wang considered, but was dissuaded from, claiming illness in order to return to Kaifeng. His fears proved well founded. Numerous former Shu officials and people had already accused the other generals of seizing women and children and taking jade and silk.

Because of their recent accomplishments, however, Taizu did not want to hand the generals over to the judicial officials for judgment, so he ordered the Secretariat-Chancellery to handle the matter. This act makes clear the political nature of the issue. High-ranking, effective generals were critical to the military and political fortunes of the dynasty and had to be handled appropriately. The subsequent investigation determined that they had taken enormous amounts of cash and valuables, and, acting on their own authority, had decreased the clothes and money distributed to the soldiers and officers of the Song army, and killed surrendered troops. These were capital crimes, but Taizu specially suspended their sentences.

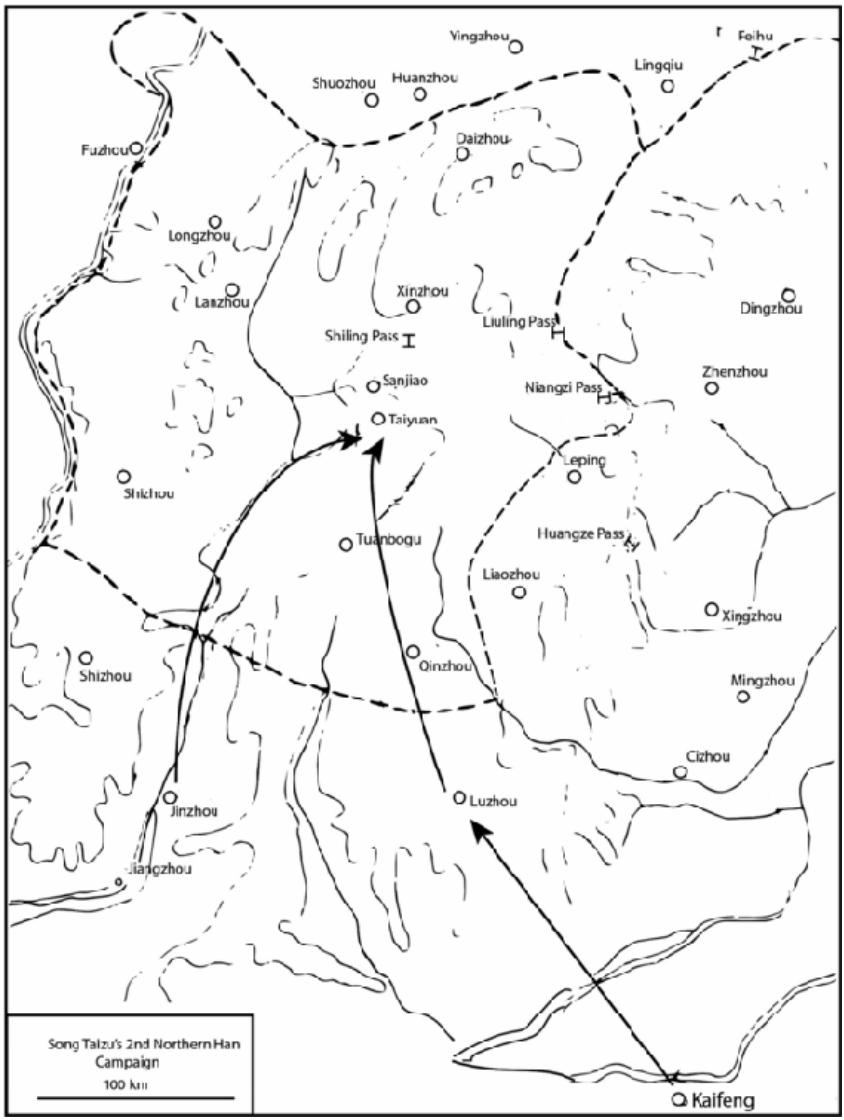
The three leaders of the northern Song force were demoted and sent to comfortable appointments away from field command. The commanders of the Yangzi force were all promoted, particularly Cao

Bin. This was a costly compromise for Taizu because he lost the services of three competent and loyal generals. His desire to impose stricter discipline on his armies was obviously important enough that he made the sacrifice, but at the same time, he had to reassure the military as a whole that loyal service would protect against severe punishment. In any case, it was an expedient that the particular political conditions at that time called for. Toward the end of his life, Taizu rehabilitated and lavishly rewarded the disgraced generals. He explained to Wang Quanbin that he had been forced to punish them in order to establish the law.[31]

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the snowy night consultation with Zhao Pu took place some time either in the winter of 965 or 966, after the conquest of Shu, but not before the subsequent rebellion had been settled. That rebellion delayed any major military undertaking by Taizu for two years. Either anticipating the resolution of the rebellion, if Leung Wai Kee is right, or having just resolved it, as I argued, the emperor was considering where to go next. He preferred to try another invasion of the Northern Han, but Zhao Pu argued for another southern campaign. What their discussion did not touch upon, however, was the continuing border problems with the Northern Han, and, to a lesser extent, the Liao.

Perhaps concerned to cover his ongoing campaign in Sichuan against Shu, Taizu had ordered his border generals to raid Northern Han territory on 28 April 965. This triggered a round of inconclusive raiding by the Northern Han and Liao. The Northern Han was unable to take advantage of the Song's problems in the former Shu kingdom to cause serious trouble. Indeed, it seems that by 965, the Northern Han was no longer capable of seriously challenging the Song by itself. But even if the Northern Han was not a threat to the existence of the Song regime, it was still an ongoing problem, and always presented the possibility of a more serious threat if it could act in conjunction with the Liao, or one of the southern kingdoms. Taizu could afford some patience, however, as he still needed time to improve the quality

of his army, some of whose shortcomings were revealed during the Shu campaign, take firmer control of the territory he possessed, and incorporate recently conquered territories.



14. Song Taizu's second Northern Han campaign

Even before the Shu campaign and rebellion was over, Taizu had already incorporated former Shu soldiers into the Song army, creating three new units of them in late April of 965,[32] and changing the names of two other Shu army units and placing them into the Song

army on 19 May.[33] On 29 August, Taizu ordered the officials throughout the realm to select brave soldiers and register their names to fill vacancies in the imperial armies. He sent out specially selected soldiers with strong physiques as models (a wooden height marker was later substituted) for selection. The men forwarded were tested in the capital under Taizu's observation. By 29 September, he had more than ten thousand new troops for the Imperial Guard.[34]

While he waited, he set up a line of fourteen border commands in the north to protect against the Liao, Northern Han, and incursions by steppe people from the west. This 967 disposition allowed him to strike something of a balance between the need for a vigilant, aggressive border defense, and the need to keep any general from getting too powerful, or having too close a tie to his troops. This line of generals was given great freedom of action, stayed at their posts for many years, and were allowed to form close ties with their troops, although, relatively few of them were allowed, and their families lived in the capital. When they came to court, Taizu was especially solicitous in receiving them, and he overlooked their transgressions as long as they continued to win battles and keep the border safe. He was thus able to exert a constant pressure against his northern opponents as he bided his time.

The second campaign against the Northern Han (10 September 968–3 July 969)[35]

That opportunity seemed to arrive in the fall of 968, and the target was once again the Northern Han. The Northern Han ruler, Liu Jun, died in July of that year, leading to considerable political instability.[36] Taizu ordered troops to concentrate at Luzhou on 10 September in preparation for an invasion of the Northern Han. Liu was succeeded by one of his nephews, Liu Jiyuan in early October.[37] By the time Liu Jiyuan succeeded to the throne, the Song army had already invaded. Not surprisingly then, one of his first acts as ruler of the Northern Han state was to request aid from the Liao. The Song army was soon beneath the walls of Taiyuan, the Northern Han capital. In mid-November, Taizu sent a letter to the Northern Han ruler and forty of his officials ordering them to surrender.[38]

This initial stage of the campaign had been carried out entirely by the Song vanguard, and it was quite successful in its mission. It had easily, and rapidly, driven through the Northern Han forces sent to oppose it, opening the road to Taiyuan and besieging it. The weakness of the Northern Han position was now obvious, since whatever was left of its border defenses after the previous Song invasion had offered no significant resistance. Taiyuan itself had become the first line of Northern Han resistance. Nevertheless, the city's defenses bought the regime enough time for the Liao to mobilize a relief army, which approached Taiyuan in mid-December. The Song force besieging Taiyuan was forced to withdraw when the Liao army raided Jin and Jiang prefectures in force.[39] The entry of the Liao into the conflict and the Song army's withdrawal to regroup did not however, dissuade Taizu from continuing his invasion plans. Part of the purpose of the vanguard's attack had been to draw out the expected Liao response, forcing them to mobilize hastily in the early winter. Liao horses would have been getting progressively weaker throughout the winter,

diminishing the capabilities of the force already in the field as well as the Liao court's ability to mobilize additional forces if the Song army returned in greater strength. Thus, while the internal political circumstances that had prompted the invasion of the Northern Han were possibly becoming less favorable, the military situation was improving throughout the winter.

Taizu assembled the main invasion force in mid-February 969, and sent it to Taiyuan on 26 February. Taizu himself left the capital for Taiyuan on 7 March. He set up an ambush for the Liao attack he expected on Song territory through Zhending in support of the Northern Han.[40] The Song invasion of the Northern Han quite accidentally coincided with the assassination of Liao emperor Muzong on 12 March 969 at the age of thirty-nine.[41] When Taizu found out about the change at the Liao court is not certain, though it does not seem to have affected the course of the campaign against the Northern Han.

Seasonal rains halted Taizu at Luzhou on 28 March. While there, he heard that the military supply system was in chaos, with carts jamming the streets of the city. He was going to punish the Transport Commissioner in charge of the supplies in Luzhou, but Zhao Pu stopped him: "Our armies are all here now. When the enemy hears that you have arrested the Transport Commissioner they will think that our supplies are insufficient. This is not the way to distantly manifest your dignity. Instead, you should select someone who can manage these difficulties and put him in charge." The next day a more competent man was put in charge of supplies at Luzhou and the problems were quickly cleared up.[42]

This incident reveals an interesting psychological aspect to campaigning, because the political and military calculus of all sides concerned was necessarily based upon information of varying reliability. Northern Han decisions regarding whether to surrender or not, including not just the ruler, but also individual commanders and soldiers spread throughout Northern Han territory, was based upon

what the Song position was thought to be. Similarly, Liao decisions with regard to troop commitments, or whether it was even practical to consider opposing the Song army were also based upon their understanding of how powerful the Song invading army appeared to be. And beyond the simple military calculations, there was also the very real possibility that some form of negotiations might take place that would be based upon the perceived disposition of troops and the resolution of the Song ruler. This situation would later be played out most dramatically before Chanyuan in 1004–5.

With the approach of the main Song army, the Northern Han position at Tuanbogu, on the road to Taiyuan, became untenable. When the commanders there fell back on 19 March, the Northern Han ruler promptly sacked them for exposing Taiyuan. The Song army proceeded to Taiyuan unopposed, and surrounded it.[43] Taizu left Luzhou on 4 April, reaching Taiyuan three days later. After inspecting the army on 12 April, he ordered the construction of a long rampart, and a bridge over the Fen River. Having drafted tens of thousands of laborers from the surrounding area, Taizu then began building a long dike connected to the Fen River. Instead of concentrating troops for a direct assault on Taiyuan, Taizu planned to inundate the city. Meanwhile, the Song army tightened its grip on the city, encircling it with fortifications. Repeated Northern Han sallies were beaten back with often desperate fighting.[44]

There was a steady drip of Northern Han commanders and officials surrendering with their commands or the territory under their control. A major Liao relief army was defeated in late April, and another on 20 May 969. Taizu's dike was ready by 26 May and the water from the Fen River was let into it to flood Taiyuan. The Song army now conducted its siege using small boats with large siege crossbows. On 19 June, the flood waters opened a gap in the outer wall and Song missile fire drove back the defenders who tried to block the hole. Northern Han's luck then turned, when hay and grass from within the city washed into the gap and plugged the hole. The Song

crossbows could not penetrate the obstruction, which allowed the Northern Han troops to wall off the gap from the inside. Nevertheless, a large Northern Han sally on the west side of the city, aimed at burning the Song siege machinery, was counter-attacked and driven off, with losses of more than ten thousand men.[45]

In spite of all the Song army's successes, however, Taiyuan continued to hold out. The siege was taking a toll on the Song army, both in terms of battle casualties and disease within the camps. Taizu rejected a call for a last desperate assault with his best troops. At the same time, another Liao relief army was marching to Taiyuan. By 23 June, Taizu had been convinced to raise the siege and withdraw.[46] He could not afford to stake everything on destroying the Northern Han when even an ultimate success would leave his army debilitated. Taizu was rational and cautious enough to accept that the campaign had failed. The Northern Han had been badly damaged, and Taizu took further steps to weaken it. In addition to regular raiding in the summer and fall to disrupt the harvests, passes were fortified to block Northern Han–Liao troop movements, and some ten thousand families were forcibly removed from the Taiyuan area and brought back to Song territory.

Taizu left Taiyuan on 3 July 969. The Northern Han had been so seriously exhausted by the siege that they had to rely upon the abandoned supplies of the departed Song army. They recovered three hundred thousand units of grain and tens of thousands of rolls of silk.[47] Considering the scale of the mobilization of soldiers and laborers, these were just crumbs. Ironically, Taiyuan's walls crumbled after the waters receded. A Liao envoy commented that: "The Song army led the water to inundate the city. They knew the first step but did not know the second. If you know how to do it correctly, first you inundate, then you drain and the walls fall." Despite the Song retreat, the siege had badly shaken the Northern Han leadership. Taiyuan was clearly vulnerable, support in outlying prefectures was soft, and the Liao court was unwilling to mobilize a large army to oppose the Song.

One general urged the Northern Han ruler to let him attack the Liao relief army presently camped at Taiyuan and then to submit to the Song. He figured that they could capture tens of thousands of horses and use the attack as a basis for submission on good terms. The Northern Han ruler rejected his plan, and a few days later the Liao army returned north.[48]

The campaign against the Northern Han had lasted ten months, and much of that time, Taizu was personally in the field. This was an unambiguous measure of his commitment to the destruction of the Northern Han. And it is indeed ironic that Taizu's longest campaign was actually a failure. Or was it? It was true that he had failed to conquer the Northern Han, but the Song army had won almost every engagement, and defeated Liao armies decisively on two occasions. Song logistics had also proven perfectly capable of maintaining the siege, in sharp distinction to the increasingly desperate conditions inside Taiyuan. Ultimately it was sickness and bad weather that forced the Song army to retreat, not the Northern Han or the Liao.

That Taizu was able to withstand this non-victory was a measure not just of the fact that he was militarily undefeated, but also of the political strength and stability of his regime. It also demonstrated that the campaign had actually done considerable damage to the Northern Han, so much in fact, that it could be seen to have accomplished quite a bit. Taizu had not come away empty-handed. He had gained territory and further weakened the Northern Han; tested Liao commitment to its client state and seen how limited it was; extended central government control through dozens of his own prefectures in the interests of supplying the army in the field; and, finally, shown the military power of his army, its ability to win battles against the most difficult opponents, as well as its ability to stay in the field as a potent force for months at a time. This had been a far more difficult military operation, both logistically and in terms of opponents, than any of his previous campaigns. The Song military would not be tested again like this until the conquest of the Southern Tang.

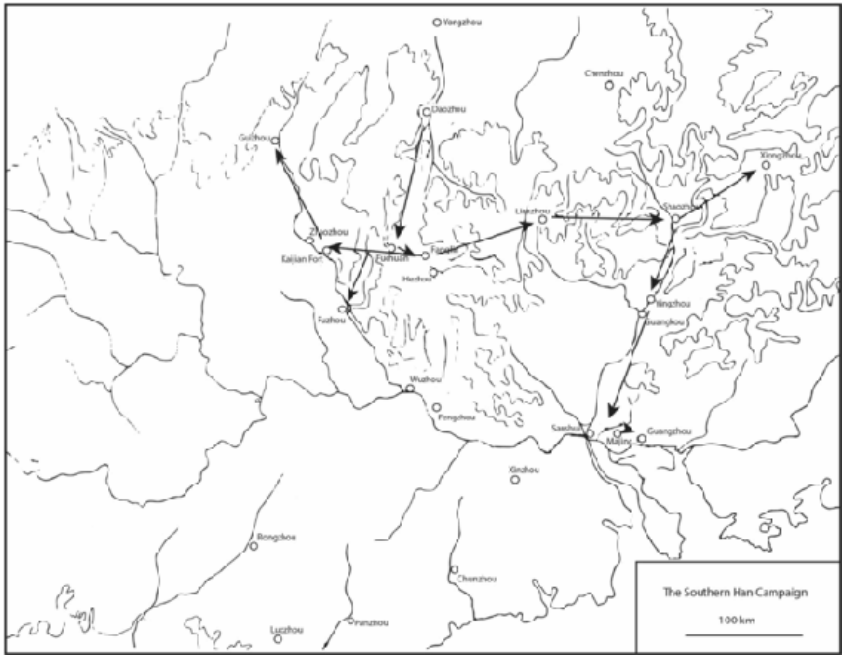
Taizu's advances on the political front were more subtle, but less ambiguous. Fu Yanqing had remained a cause for concern despite Taizu's narrowly averted attempt to give him a central army command. Fu, along with twelve others, was summoned to the Flying Dragon Hall on 31 January 969, where Taizu bestowed horses on him. Fu, along with Shi Shouxin, Gao Huaide, Wang Shenqi, and Feng Jiye had previously been summoned to the capital from their respective military governorships. This then was the second step after "dissolving military power over a cup of wine," where the powerful men previously sent out from the center to strengthen the emperor's authority were brought back to the capital to increase his regional power.

Although Taizu's old comrades had understood and accepted this, Fu Yanqing at first did not. Having controlled Daming for more than ten years, he had not expected to be kept away from it for long when he was summoned to the capital. His request to return to Daming on 21 February was rejected.[49] Taizu's method was indirect, but relentless. Rather than order Fu Yanqing to give up his position, he simply did not give him permission to leave the capital, while Fu's greedy subordinate, who he had left in charge, ran his power base. By 5 September, Fu realized that he was never going to be allowed to return, and began to propose that an official be selected to replace him. A possibly troublesome regional power-holder was thus induced to "voluntarily" give up his power directly to the Song government. Taizu convinced five more military governors to retire at a drinking party on 7 December 969.[50]

While Taizu gradually dismantled the structure of independent power-holders, he continued to take extraordinary steps to win over and support his border generals. He sent agents into Liao territory to bring back Dong Zunhui's mother, living in Youzhou, thus winning his undying loyalty.[51] When Li Qianpu unreservedly supported one of his subordinates who was under suspicion of being in contact with the Northern Han, Taizu absolved the man. And when an official reported

Guo Jin for using roof tiles with semi-circular cross sections on his mansion hall, something restricted by sumptuary laws to official buildings, temples, and the residences of high-ranking officials, Taizu upbraided the official for careless speech.[52] Guo had kept his section of the border secure for ten years. Such minor transgressions were insignificant in the face of those accomplishments.[53]

At the same time, Taizu could be quite suspicious of loyal generals. In 966, he nearly punished the Commander in Chief of the Palace Corps, Han Zhongyun, because of accusations that Han had recruited a group of personal troops. Zhao Pu intervened, arguing that no one would be willing to serve the emperor as a commander if they could not recruit men to serve them. A grateful Han tried to thank Zhao, but he refused to see him. True, this was probably another round in the political struggle between Zhao Pu and Kuangyi, though Han Zhongyun was not an adherent of Zhao, but it shows how suspicious Taizu was of his high-ranking generals.[54] Yet he had good reason to worry about the loyalty of his soldiers. Taizu foiled a coup attempt on the night of 26 November 969 by a group of military commanders.[55] It is not surprising then, that he would forbid people in the capital from storing weapons.[56] Taizu's efforts to strengthen the army while increasing his control of it, not demilitarizing his regime as some would have it, were not always perfect, but there were very real internal and external dangers threatening the Song which had to be dealt with.



15. Song Taizu's Southern Han campaign

One of Taizu's pressing needs within the government remained the supply of competent bureaucrats. There was, as yet, no regular system of selection and appointment, and favoritism in the exam system had left Taizu ambivalent, if not hostile, to it. The day after the names of the ten men who had passed the various exams were submitted on 10 April 968, when Tao Gu's (903–970) son Bing, who was sixth on the list, entered court to thank Taizu, the emperor commented to his attendants: "[I've] heard that Tao was unable to train his son. How did Bing get listed?" He ordered the tests repeated, but Bing was again listed as passing, demonstrating to Taizu that the exams were functioning as a patronage system that could lead to the flourishing of factions.[57] Yet the emperor's own choice of men to serve him could be quite arbitrary. He promoted Lu Duosun (934–985) initially because of his capabilities as a historian and librarian.[58] Lu was fairly competent, however, and would serve as prefect of Taiyuan superior prefecture during the second Northern Han campaign.[59] But his later analysis, after interviewing a member of a Southern Tang

entourage, that the Southern Tang were leaderless, was myopic.[60] Ultimately, Lu would shift his allegiance to Kuangyi, who would use him to strike at Zhao Pu from his trusted position near Taizu. Thus, Taizu's selection methods were equally prone to factionalism.

The campaign against the Southern Han (3 October 970–22 March 971)[61]

Taizu waited for another military opportunity from July of 969 until the autumn of 970. His possible targets were now reduced to the Northern Han, the Sixteen Prefectures controlled by the Liao, the Southern Han, and the Southern Tang. The recent change in Liao leadership did not offer a good opportunity for a northern campaign, and the northern border remained fairly quiet. The Southern Tang was still a large state, and it maintained an extremely servile relationship with the Song court. The Southern Han, in contrast, resolutely rebuffed Song overtures (sent via the Southern Tang). Lacking any good opportunities, Taizu decided to conquer the Southern Han in September of 970. Without any real provocation or excuse, this invasion was probably Taizu's most naked display of aggression. Taizu placed Pan Mei in charge of the invasion on 3 October, and ordered troops from several prefectures to converge on Hezhou.[62]

By 21 October, Pan Mei, in the first major engagement of the campaign, defeated a Southern Han force, killing more than ten thousand soldiers and capturing Fuzhou. The Southern Han was poorly prepared for war. Due to a great deal of infighting in the royal family, most of their generals had been impeached and executed, leaving the military in the hands of a few eunuchs. The walls and fortifications were in disrepair across the state, the warships were unprepared, the weapons and armor were decrepit, and the troops had not been paid in a long time.

The Song invasion shocked the Southern Han court, and before it had fully digested what was happening, the Song army surrounded Hezhou. The Southern Han ruler called all his officials in to discuss the situation. They all recommended putting Pan Chongche in charge of defending the state. Pan, who had previously been sacked, was still discontent and refused the appointment, claiming to have an eye

ailment. The Southern Han ruler was furious: “Why must we use Pan Chongche? Is Wu Yanrou without strategies?” Consequently, he sent a force under Wu Yanrou to relieve Hezhou. It quickly became apparent why the Southern Han courtiers had all recommended Pan Chongche and not Wu Yanrou. Wu was drawn into an ambush on the night of 22 October, and beheaded. The Song troops then showed Wu’s head to the defenders of Hezhou, seriously demoralizing the besieged troops. This was followed shortly afterward by a sudden Song assault on Hezhou that filled in the moat in front of the city gate and convinced the inhabitants to open the gate and surrender.[63]

The Song army at Hezhou was upstream of Guangzhou, the capital of the Southern Han. Since the He River was navigable, the Song army could now advance very quickly on the Southern Han capital. This danger overcame the Southern Han ruler’s dislike of Pan Chongche, and Pan was put in charge of thirty thousand troops. Pan took a defensive position at the mouth of the He River, but did not advance toward the Song army. Meanwhile, the Song army had divided in two, one part heading west and one part heading east. The western force had already reached Zhaozhou, and the West River, by the time Pan Chongche was at the He River. Pan was only positioned to prevent a Song advance down the He or West Rivers, but could do nothing about the eastern Song force. Once the eastern force reached Shaozhou and the North River, it could also quickly strike downstream at the Southern Han capital. But Pan and his army were pinned down as long as the western force stayed upstream of him on either the He or West River. The western force remained a significant threat the entire campaign.

The western Song army overran Kaijian Fort on 24 November 970, and then captured Zhaozhou and Guizhou without resistance after their prefects fled. The eastern Song army overran Lianzhou, at which point, the Southern Han ruler ordered Gui and Lian prefectures evacuated in advance of the Song army’s arrival in the hope that it would stop at conquering Zhao, Gui, Lian, and He prefectures. It was a

vain hope.

The eastern Song army had almost reached Shaozhou by 20 January 971, when it ran into a Southern Han army of more than a hundred thousand troops beneath Lianhuafeng Mountain, blocking the route to the capital. War elephants, each carrying more than ten men, were placed at the front of the Southern Han formations to strengthen them. The Song army concentrated its crossbow fire on the elephants, causing them to flee. All the soldiers riding on the elephants were thrown off and trampled as the elephants stampeded back into the Southern Han formation. The Song army attacked the shattered and disorganized Southern Han army, destroying its remaining cohesion. Shaozhou was then captured.[64]

The Southern Han ruler received conflicting advice from his generals and officials. Some felt it was time to surrender, others that they could hold out. The Southern Han ruler chose to build a palisade east of the capital at Majing to defend it against the Song army, defended by sixty thousand troops. The lack of unity at the Southern Han court over how to react to the invasion is yet another reminder that the Song conquest was not seen as inevitable at the time. It was also not obvious to the Southern Han courtiers that unification of China was a natural tendency that they would expect to see.

In February of 971, the eastern Song army captured Yingzhou and Xiongzhou, prompting Pan Chongche to surrender. The Song advance down the North River had already made Pan's position irrelevant. When the Song army reached Longtou, the Southern Han ruler sent an envoy to ask for peace. Longtou was a strategically important area with difficult terrain. Pan Mei, concerned about being ambushed, took the envoy hostage in order to quickly pass through the strategically important points. The Song army reached Zhakou, three miles from Majing on 25 February. The following day, Pan Mei marched to Shuangnu Mountain, overlooking the palisade. The defending army and the palisade were the last obstacles between the Song army and the Southern Han capital.[65]

The Southern Han commander's only plan was to defend the rampart, and pray to the gods day and night. It was at this time that the Southern Han ruler decided to flee his country. He had more than ten ships prepared with gold, treasures, and concubines so that he could escape to the sea, but when it came time to leave, he discovered that his eunuchs and soldiers had sailed without him. Now really frightened, he sent a letter of surrender to the Song army. Pan Mei sent the messengers bearing the letter on to Taizu and continued with the campaign. In desperation, the Southern Han army arrayed for battle on 3 March 971, with the river across its front. The Song army crossed the river and crushed them, with the remnants straggling back behind the palisade.

Pan Mei, seeing that the rampart was made of wood with interwoven bamboo, sent five thousand troops, each carrying two torches, to sneak up to the rampart. At twilight, they all lit their torches and threw them in. A great wind also sprang up raising dust and smoke. The Southern Han army was badly defeated, prompting several Southern Han officials within the palace to set fire to all the storehouses and palace buildings in the hope that the Song army would withdraw once the treasure of the state was gone. Everything was destroyed in that night.

The next day, the Song army reached Baitian. The Southern Han ruler put on ordinary clothing, came out and surrendered. Pan Mei's official report of the triumph arrived in Kaifeng on 22 March. The defeat of the Southern Han netted the Song sixty prefectures with two hundred and fourteen counties, and a population of 172,263 households.[66]

With the conquest of the Southern Han, Taizu put himself back on the road to success, particularly important after his failed campaign against the Northern Han. One of the unavoidable consequences of success, however, was diminished strategic flexibility. Since Taizu had clearly decided to put off a direct confrontation with the Liao if at all possible, there were, practically speaking, only two possible targets to

choose from, the Northern Han and the Southern Tang.

[1] Jiang Fucong, "Song Taizu shi Taizong yu Zhao Pu de Zhengzheng," *Shixue Yuekan*, 5, 1–14. Although all subsequent references will be to the primary sources, my awareness of their significance is entirely due to Jiang Fucong's article.

[2] XCB 33.727.

[3] XCB 4.83–4.

[4] Worthy, p. 179.

[5] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 161–3.

[6] XCB 4.97–106.

[7] XCB 4.112.

[8] Marcia Butler, in the most extensive discussion of *zhentu* available, calls them "battle array schema." Butler argues that "[*Z*]*hentu* described in prescriptive texts incorporated and organized many of the kinds of divination found in the manuals under consideration, allowing the army to fuse with the supernatural power by crossing phenomenal boundaries, such as time, space, and the elements. In their cosmology, these schemas functioned in accordance with the universal order." Marcia Butler, "Reflections of a Military Medium: Ritual and Magic in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Chinese Military Manuals," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2007, p. 110. It became something of a fashion during the Song dynasty to design and present *zhentu* as part of advocating for war. In this context, it should be understood more broadly to be something like campaign plans.

[9] XCB 4.112.

[10] XCB 4.113–4.

[11] XCB 5.121.

[12] Toqto'a, *Liaoshi* [hereafter LS], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 6.77.

[13] For a succinct compilation of these events in the *Liaoshi* and *Qidan Guozhi*, see Cheng Guangyu, Song Taizong dui Liao Zhanzheng Kao, Taibei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1970, pp. 5–9.

[14] XCB 5.127.

[15] XCB 5.119.

[16] XCB 5.125–6. Li Tao's discussion of the reason for creating the new position and promoting Xue Juzheng turns on the question of whether or not Taizu wanted to reduce Zhao Pu's power at that time. See also Zhang Qifan, Songchu Zhengzhi Tanyan, Guangzhou: Jinan Daxue Chubanshe, 1995, pp. 32–4.

[17] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 164–73.

[18] XCB 5.134–5.

[19] Shui-lung Tsang slightly miscited this passage. It is in XCB 5.135 rather than XCB 6.146–9. Shui-lung Tsang, “War and Peace in Northern Sung China: Violence and Strategy in Flux, 960–1104 A.D.,” Ph.D. Diss., The University of Arizona, 1997, p. 66.

[20] XCB 5.137.

[21] XCB 5.137–8.

[22] XCB 6.145.

[23] XCB 5.138.

[24] XCB 6.143–4.

[25] XCB 6.147–8.

[26] 6.150–2. I cannot account for the missing three thousand soldiers who escaped death.

[27] For the rough dating of the mutiny, see Li Tao’s note in XCB 6.162.

[28] XCB 6.161–3.

[29] XCB 7.166–7.

[30] XCB 7.178.

[31] SS 255.8924.

[32] XCB 6.150.

[33] XCB 6.153.

[34] XCB 6.156–7.

[35] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 174–84.

[36] SS 2.27.

[37] XCB 9.206–7.

[38] XCB 9.210.

[39] XCB 9.212.

[40] XCB 10.216–7.

[41] LS 7.87.

[42] XCB 10.217.

[43] XCB 10.218.

[44] XCB 10.219–20.

[45] XCB 10.220–2.

[46] XCB 10.224–5.

[47] XCB 10.226.

[48] XCB 10.228.

[49] XCB 10.215–6.

[50] XCB 10.233.

[51] XCB 9.203–4.

[52] On the *tongwa* tiles, see Beijingshi Wenwu Yanjiusuo, Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhu Cidian, Beijing: Zhongguo Shudian, 1992, p. 112. My thanks to Tracy Miller for providing me with this reference.

[53] XCB 11.248–9.

[54] XCB 8.190.

[55] XCB 10.232–3.

[56] XCB 11.246.

[57] XCB 9.200.

[58] XCB 9.201–2.

[59] XCB 10.219.

[60] XCB 10.227.

[61] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 185–91.

[62] XCB 11.249.

[63] XCB 11.250.

[64] XCB 11.252–4.

[65] XCB12.258–9.

[66] XCB 12.259–61.

7

Separating war and politics

From March of 971 until October of 974 Taizu was fully occupied with governing his empire. This was not entirely by choice, however, as heavy rains caused enormous problems on the Yellow River and simply taking administrative control over the lands of the Southern Han proved difficult. His rapidly expanded regime was critically short of reliable, competent officials. To make matters still worse, his most recently acquired lands were quite a distance from Kaifeng, as were the not yet fully incorporated lands of Shu. It was vital that he spend some time consolidating his recent gains. The Northern Han still engaged in some desultory raiding, which was responded to in kind, but the Liao were entirely quiet, leaving open the possibility of creating some kind of modus vivendi. As for the Southern Tang, Taizu was hopeful that escalating diplomatic pressure would induce its ruler to capitulate without a war. Time was still on Taizu's side.

The political struggle between Zhao Pu and Kuangyi was also reaching a climax, with profound effects for the future of the dynasty. Despite his political wisdom, Zhao may not have fully understood the stakes that Kuangyi was playing for. If he had, he would surely have tried to convince Taizu officially to designate his son Heir-Apparent. Such an effort would probably have failed – Taizu was far too strong politically to give in to that kind of request – but Zhao might have found a way, as he so often did, to convince the emperor. With the regime now appearing to be stable, notwithstanding the foiled coup attempt, struggling for power within the dynasty was becoming more important than struggling to increase the dynasty's power. The ambitious could now devote less of their energy to serving the dynasty

and more of it to serving themselves. For Kuangyi in particular, the situation now became a struggle for the future of the regime. This was a blind spot for Zhao Pu, as his immense power effectively foreclosed any possibility for future personal advancement. He was not, after all, a member of the imperial family, which precluded him from rising any higher than being an official who served the emperor. Anything more would have required the replacement of the Song regime, something which was becoming increasingly difficult and unlikely, and which Zhao Pu was not interested in attempting. Kuangyi, on the other hand, was close enough to imagine achieving the ultimate goal, becoming emperor.

Now that the question of dynastic survival was less pressing, the question of how the dynasty would proceed, how power would be distributed within it, and how power would be transferred and legitimated over the long term, came to the fore. It was clearly not an issue that Taizu gave much thought to, nor did he allow discussion of it to distract attention and loyalty from himself. Kuangyi, on the other hand, who would exploit this oversight on his older brother's part to seize the throne, put a great deal of effort into structuring and institutionalizing the movement of power when he became emperor in order to legitimate his own position. That was for the future; in the early 970s, Kuangyi's most important objective was dislodging Zhao Pu from power. For, whereas Taizu relied upon his immense military prestige to supply himself with legitimacy and political power, Kuangyi had been confined to a purely political role. His main competitor in that realm was Zhao Pu.

It is at this point that we begin to see the impending separation between war and politics taking shape, though it would not be fully played out until the rule of Kuangyi's son, the third Song emperor, posthumously known as Zhenzong. Kuangyi, separated by various barriers, not the least of which was competence, from a military role in the formation of the dynasty, was forced to pursue his ambitions for power solely in the political sphere. While Taizu combined both

military and political power, Kuangyi's power base was necessarily built in the political sphere, though he made great, but mostly failed, efforts to gain influence over the army as well. As the most intense period of military activity came to a close, however, and the military sphere began to reach the limits of its expansion, new political vistas began to open up. In other words, as war became less important, politics became more important. This may also explain Zhao Pu's blindness to the seriousness of Kuangyi's threat, and that of Taizu as well; both men were too preoccupied with, and perhaps too oriented towards, building the Song empire to fathom the outlines of the new game.

Zhao Pu's record of loyal and wise service had given him a strong position in the Song regime, but Taizu was an extremely suspicious man. Although loyalty might provide a shield against bloody vengeance, it did not guarantee an official or general a position of power, as Wang Quanbin had discovered. In 971, Zhao Pian [or Pin] (921–978) attacked Zhao Pu in an audience with Taizu for trading in timber, which officials were prohibited from doing. Taizu was furious and turned the matter over to his officials to determine punishment in the matter. Instead, they responded that Zhao Pian had baselessly slandered Zhao Pu. Zhao Pian was beaten, demoted, and sent out of the capital. Jiang Fucong points out that, although this attack was apparently spurred by a private dispute, it did have an impact on Zhao Pu's position.[1] It also demonstrates how easily the merest hint of transgression by even someone as significant, trusted, and loyal as Zhao Pu could move Taizu to anger and possibly punishment.

A perhaps more significant and regular source of criticism of Zhao came from Lu Duosun. Lu frequently pointed out Zhao's shortcomings to Taizu, though I disagree with Wang Fuzhi's (1619–1692) assessment that Lu was motivated by the desire to maintain the late dowager empress's (Taizu and Kuangyi's mother) order that Kuangyi should succeed Taizu.[2] I will take up this issue in greater detail in Chapter 8, but several points do warrant attention at this time. First,

Lu's most obvious motivation for attacking Zhao Pu was to increase his own power. Obviously, in a hierarchical bureaucracy, the only way to advance is if those above you are first removed. Zhao's long tenure as Chief Councilor was an obstacle to an ambitious official. Second, it was equally clear that Kuangyi would look favorably on any attack on Zhao. Lu's criticisms thus did double duty, acting both to remove an obstacle from his own path, and to win favor with one of the most powerful men in the regime. Although he probably did not expect Kuangyi to become emperor, he did understand that his own route to power lay entirely in the political sphere. In that respect Lu would eventually become the first Song Chief Councilor to live and die by court politics alone. Third, Lu did not directly serve Kuangyi, or belong to any sort of faction. His power came entirely from Taizu, and was the result of his proximity to the emperor. He therefore had no base of support within the bureaucracy, and was attempting to advance no agenda beyond his own, personal advancement.

Lu Duosun's criticisms and Kuangyi's attempts to undermine Zhao Pu would ultimately prove less directly important to Zhao's downfall than his own actions, and Taizu's fundamental discomfort with anyone else holding so much power in his regime. In 964, shortly after the three previous incumbent Grand Councilors were retired and Zhao Pu became the sole Grand Councilor, Taizu revived the title of Participant in Determining Governmental Matters, ranked just below Grand Councilor.[3] It was initially a title of little functional significance, as clearly demonstrated by Taizu's dispatch of the two initial bearers, Xue Juzheng and Lu Yuqing, out to provincial duties through 972. That changed on 22 July 973, when Taizu, now beginning to be suspicious of Zhao Pu's power, summoned Xue and Lu to discuss government affairs together with Zhao.[4] Zhao had earlier displeased Taizu when he married his son to the daughter of Li Chongju, the Military Affairs Commissioner, in 972.This marriage bridged the division of powers between the civil and military sides of government, though the two men had been good friends for some time before that.

Yet it should not be thought that Taizu had lost all faith in his long-time retainer. Theirs was a much more complicated relationship with deep reserves of trust, despite whatever concerns the emperor had about the immediate political concerns of a Chief Councilor whose power in some ways rivaled his own. Taizu had left Zhao to run the government since its inception, but after more than a decade of rule, it no longer seemed appropriate to continue to operate the empire in such an ad hoc way. Up until Zhao's dismissal in 973, the Song government had basically functioned as an extension of Taizu's household, with his most trusted retainer responsible for its proper running. Although Lu Duosun and Zhao Pian are particularly noted for their attacks on Zhao Pu, other court officials were similarly dissatisfied with his long tenure and strong hold on power. Eight days after summoning Xue Juzheng and Lu Yuqing to discuss matters along with Zhao, he brought them back and essentially institutionalized the practice in order to diminish Zhao's power. In this sense, Taizu was acting both to depersonalize the government, and to bring up a new cohort of bureaucrats just as he had brought up a new cohort of generals.

Taizu finally removed Zhao Pu from power completely on 22 September 973. The self-criticism he sent to Taizu in departing is instructive in framing both his relationship to the emperor and the imperial family, and demonstrating what he believed to be the reason for his dismissal: "Outsiders said that Your Servant disrespectfully discussed the imperial younger brother, the Governor of Kaifeng. The imperial younger brother is loyal, filial and of complete virtue, how could there be a separation like this?"[5] Zhao clearly believed that negative comments on his part concerning Kuangyi had convinced Taizu to dismiss him. Kuangyi was, after all, Taizu's brother, and he could not have a family retainer speak ill of him. The issue was perhaps broader than that, however, and it may have been that Zhao believed that Taizu had finally gotten tired of the fighting between Zhao and Kuangyi, and decided in favor of his brother. Zhao was thus

asserting that whatever disagreements he had with Kuangyi, they were not personal, and the two men were not really enemies.

Zhao Pu's departure was followed by a wave of promotions. Xue Juzheng was promoted to Vice Director of the Chancellery and Assistant Military Affairs Commissioner on 17 October and Shen Yilun was promoted to Vice Director of the Secretariat and concurrently Manager of Affairs, effectively making Xue and Shen Grand Councilors, though their titles fell slightly short of that. Lu Duosun was promoted to Secretariat Drafter and Participant in Determining Governmental Matters, the position which Taizu had so recently revived and formalized, and which also placed Lu in the Council of State with Xue and Shen. The Council of State was rounded out by Chu Zhaofu's promotion to Assistant Military Affairs Commissioner (the position which Xue Juzheng also held). These four men now held among them the power that Zhao Pu had monopolized for more than a decade. They were responsible for the day-to-day running of the government.

Six far more powerful men also received promotions at that time, Kuangyi, Guangmei, Dezhao, Shi Shouxin, Gao Huaide, and Wang Shenqi. Once again, Taizu's two younger brothers and his son advanced together, while three of his surviving old comrades were given important titles in the central government. Kuangyi's status was decreed above that of the Grand Councilors on 20 October. Kuangyi had very clearly and decisively won his struggle with Zhao Pu. He had even gone so far as to get his brother to formally declare that his status was supragovernmental. This was an institutional expression of the outcome of his struggle with Zhao Pu, and it would ensure that he would now be higher ranked than any succeeding Grand Councilors. A personal situation had become institutional practice.

Jiang Fucong drew six conclusions from Kuangyi's official elevation above the status of Grand Councilor. First, following the Five Dynasties' practice, Kuangyi's positions as King of Jin and Governor of Kaifeng indicated that he was to succeed Taizu. Second,

the promotions of Guangmei and Dezhao indicate that, apropos of the Golden Casket Pledge (see Chapter 8), they, in turn, were to succeed Kuangyi. Third, Xue Juzheng and Shen Yilun's promotions to Grand Councilors changed the practice under Zhao Pu of having one Grand Councilor. Fourth, Shi Shouxin, Gao Huaide, and Wang Shenqi were promoted in order to reassure the men involved in founding the dynasty and place them above Zhao Pu. Fifth, Lu Duosun's promotion to Participant in Determining Governmental Affairs was a reward for opposing Zhao. Sixth, Chu Zhaofu's promotion to Assistant Military Affairs Commissioner, and Yang Yi's promotion to Palace Corps Commander in Chief, a post which had remained unfilled for six years, returned control over the army to its proper hierarchy, where it would not again be struggled over.[6]

Jiang's first two points, regarding Taizu's intended succession, are problematic, and will be discussed later. For now, it is simply important to note that Taizu never explicitly designated his successor in any public forum. This was in sharp contrast to Kuangyi. His other four points demonstrate the extremely complex political calculus that informed Taizu's management of the Song dynasty. Military and political power overlapped and interlocked, and was extremely personal. Taizu's three old comrades were now related by marriage to the imperial family, fulfilling his earlier promise, but also meaning that they were now more like Kuangyi, Guangmei, and Dezhao, than Zhao Pu. Military and political power was now actually separated within the government, because none of the members of the Council of State had the sort of prestige or imperial trust which in Zhao Pu's case had neutralized the institutional division of authority. And as much as Kuangyi had been elevated to an extremely exalted position, he was not given the authority over the army which Zhao Pu's efforts had kept him from, or even a real increase in political power. In fact, with the dispersal of power among the four members of the Council of State, not only had Kuangyi not gained any power, his power to influence the government had actually been diminished through

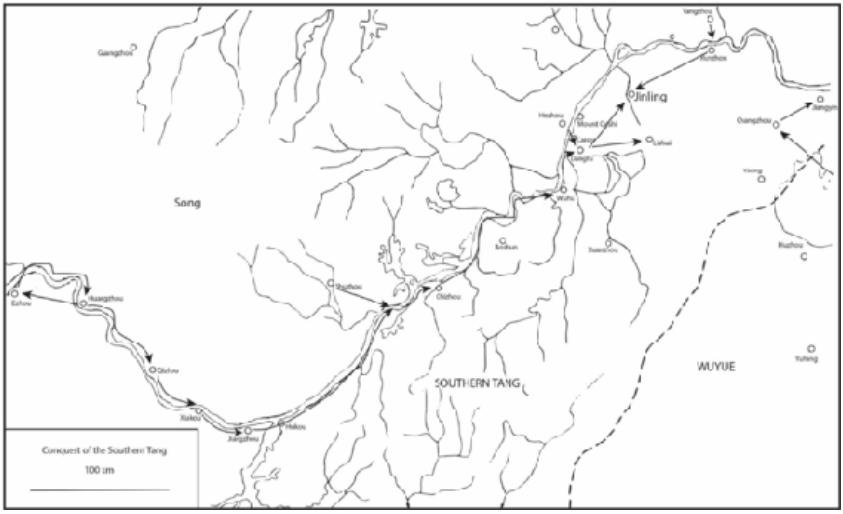
institutionalization. It was no longer Kuangyi versus Zhao Pu, but Kuangyi versus the government. Taizu had reasserted his own power, and tightened his grip on the government. He could now return his attention to military campaigns.

The fall of the Southern Han left Taizu with very few targets for further conquest. He could try to conquer the Northern Han again or attack the Sixteen Prefectures. He could also continue his efforts in the south and attack the Southern Tang. Both northern options would involve fighting the Liao. But it was one thing to fend off Liao border incursions, it was quite another to face their regular army in the field. Liao cavalry was superior to Song cavalry in both numbers and quality. It was also very difficult to supply the army in the north, where there were fewer navigable waterways than in the south. Balanced against the possible value of the territorial gains, which were minimal, the northern option was clearly less attractive than further campaigns in the south. The Southern Tang was still a fairly wealthy country, even after losing the Huainan region (now part of the Song empire) to Zhou Shizong, and the Song could bring their superior naval strength to bear.

Whatever Taizu's compunctions about attacking the Southern Tang without a casus belli, his strategic calculus overcame his conscience. The Southern Tang court's continued resistance to diplomatic pressure was frustrating. Like every other tenth-century kingdom, the Southern Tang simply refused to "accept" that the Song would inevitably reconstruct the Tang empire, or that they could not continue to exist as a vassal state outside of direct Song rule. Taizu had increased the diplomatic pressure on the Southern Tang court, using the excuse of the Southern Tang ruler attempting to bribe Zhao Pu with fifty thousand taels of silver, to do away with the name "Tang" and give its envoy a new seal for communication with the Song court which read "Kingdom of Jiangnan" on 21 November 971 (for consistency, I will continue to refer to the state as the Southern Tang).[7] In this late stage of conquest, however, Taizu had to proceed

more carefully. The new Liao emperor might not be as quiescent as his predecessor, and the geopolitical situation was much clearer in the 970s than it had been before. In order to take some measures to diminish the possibility of Liao cooperation with the Southern Tang, Taizu sent an envoy to the Liao in late March or early April of 974 to discuss the possibilities of peace negotiations.[8] This opened a new chapter in Song–Liao relations, and began to establish the political framework that would ultimately govern a stable relationship. In the short term, the possibility of a peaceful relationship with the Song gave the Liao a good reason not to intercede militarily or diplomatically in support of the Southern Tang. Having gone some way toward securing his northern border from the major threat, and tired of what was proving to be a fruitless diplomatic game in the south, in the middle of 974, Taizu decided to invade the Southern Tang.

At about that time, a Southern Tang man by the name of Fan Ruobing, frustrated in his attempts at a career in the Tang government, decided to defect to the Song. Fan wisely realized that if he wanted to pursue a career in the Song government, he would need something to offer. Under the guise of fishing, he repeatedly traversed the Yangzi River at Caishi and carefully measured the distance from the south bank to the north bank. Fan then crossed over to the Song side and made it known to the Song court that he had a plan for capturing Jiangnan. After the plan, which involved building a pontoon bridge across the river to facilitate supply, was vetted and approved, Fan was given a position and his plan put into action. An order was sent to Jinghu to construct several thousand large warships and Yellow and Black Dragon boats, some of which would serve as pontoons for the bridge. Song military preparations now got under way in earnest. The only thing that could have stopped the invasion at that point was voluntary capitulation on the part of the Southern Tang court, which was not forthcoming.



16. Song Taizu's Southern Tang campaign

The campaign against the Southern Tang (6 October 974–5 January 976)[9]

Cao Bin was put in overall command of the Southern Tang campaign because he was the only general who had adequately controlled his troops during the conquest of Shu. Taizu wanted to avoid a repeat of the rebellion that the Song army's depredations against the residents of Shu had caused. Before sending the generals to conquer the Southern Tang, Taizu admonished them: "The Southern matter is entirely entrusted to you. On no account violate the people, you must broaden majesty and credibility, allowing them to return to obedience themselves, it is not necessary to urgently attack them." Cao Bin reassured Taizu: "If any of the subordinate generals doesn't obey this command I will behead them." Pan Mei and the other generals all turned white when they heard that.[10]

Taizu began concentrating troops for a Southern Tang campaign at Jingnan on 6 October 974. On 10 October, Taizu sent a letter to the Southern Tang ruler asking him to submit to the Song. The Southern Tang ruler was initially inclined to submit, but two of his closest advisors objected. The day that Taizu received the Southern Tang ruler's refusal, he sent further forces to Jingnan. Taizu inspected the Song navy in the Bian practice basin on 27 October, and again two days later, before sending them to the south. The Southern Tang ruler was still unaware that Taizu had decided to attack him. Although he had refused to go to the Song court and submit to Taizu, he did send his heir-apparent to pay his respects. The heir-apparent was not allowed to return to the Southern Tang.

The campaign opened on 4 November when the Song army invaded the Southern Tang from Jingnan. Cao Bin crossed the Yangzi on 11 November and overran Xiakou Fort. In previous years, the Song army had sent annual patrols down to the Southern Tang border along the Yangzi across from Chizhou. Song troops would set up camp along

the river, facing the city. When the Southern Tang defending general of Chizhou realized that the Song army was really invading, he fled the city. Cao Bin entered Chizhou unopposed on 21 November. Thus, almost immediately upon beginning the invasion, the Song had seized a foothold across the Yangzi.[11]

Although Cao or Taizu's strategy for conquering the Southern Tang was not explicitly stated, the course of the campaign makes it very clear. Like all of the previous Song campaigns, the primary objective of the expeditionary army was to capture the kingdom's capital and its ruler, and to thereby force the surrender of its remaining territory. This was a fairly successful strategy, though it had failed twice against the Northern Han, and it is thus not surprising, that it did not need to be laid out explicitly. Cao's objective, then, was to isolate and besiege Jinling, the Southern Tang capital, until either the Southern Tang ruler capitulated, or the city fell, and he could capture the ruler and his government. The second action was much less desirable, as it left a greater possibility that the rest of the kingdom would then not submit peacefully. At root then, it was a strategy aimed at the mind of the Southern Tang ruler. Unfortunately, the Tang ruler's isolation from the affairs of government and the heavily filtered reports of the invasion he received from his court, kept him from receiving the full impact of his kingdom's deteriorating military situation. This prolonged the war to the point where even after months of continuous victories by the Song army, Taizu began to despair of succeeding.

Having taken a foothold on the south bank of the Yangzi, Cao Bin had three immediate tasks. First, he had to reach Jinling and besiege it. Second, he had to establish a communications link with Song territory that would allow him to transport men and supplies into Southern Tang territory to support the siege. Third, he had to secure his position around Jinling and his communications with Song territory from attack. In practice, this meant that Cao had to secure the upper reaches of the Yangzi above Jinling, at the same time that

he marched east, downstream, systematically driving the Southern Tang army and navy from the river. As the siege dragged on, Cao's objectives shifted to destroying the Tang navy and army to secure his position and put additional pressure on the Tang court. No effort was put into conquering the majority of Southern Tang territory, leaving military activity exclusively concentrated in the northern part of the Southern Tang kingdom.

Cao Bin defeated a Southern Tang force at Tongling, thirty-seven miles northwest of Chizhou, on 29 November 974, overran Wuhu, and marched to Dangtu, which surrendered on 4 December. Cao then crushed a Southern Tang army of more than twenty thousand men at Caishiji on 9 December. A second Song army attacked and defeated a Tang force at Pingxiang on 17 December. The prepared pontoon bridge was moved from Shipaizhen to Caishiji, upstream from the Southern Tang capital. The work was completed in three days. Cao now had his communications link to Song territory and could bring over the requisite men and materials to conduct a siege of Jinling.

The Southern Tang ruler was not entirely isolated in his palace, and news of the pontoon bridge soon reached him. He and his advisors believed the bridge was a "child's tale," though they did understand that a Song expeditionary force was on the south bank of the Yangzi.[12] That day, he sent a naval force with ten thousand sailors and an army with ten thousand soldiers to fight the Song army. Several hundred miles upstream from Caishiji, at almost the farthest point on the Yangzi still in Southern Tang territory, a third Song army defeated a more than three thousand man Southern Tang naval force from Ezhou on 31 December, capturing more than forty warships.[13] A second Southern Tang Ezhou naval force of more than thousand men was defeated on the north bank of the Yangzi on 18 January 975.[14] Song army units near Ezhou seemed content to pin down the Southern Tang forces in the area, and keep them from threatening any of the other Song forces farther downstream. They never attempted to capture Ezhou itself, but their presence on the river hemmed in the

Tang forces stationed there. The Tang army would have to first destroy the nearby Song army and navy before it could proceed downriver, because if the bulk of the Tang army left Ezhou and got past the Song cordon, it would leave the city exposed to capture. Although the Song army did not besiege Ezhou, it did continue gradually to encroach upon its environs. This was very much a sideshow compared to the main action near Jinling.

Cao Bin's march on the Southern Tang capital continued, and on 5 January 975, he defeated several thousand Tang soldiers at Xinlin Fort and captured thirty warships. A series of Song army and navy victories in January and February brought the Song military to the Li River by 21 February, near the Southern Tang capital, while other Song units struck to the south of the capital. An allied army under the direct command of the King of Wuyue struck from southwest of Jinling.[15] Cao Bin himself reached Jinling, the Southern Tang capital on 2 March. A Song force crossed the Qinhuai River, south of Jinling, and attacked Jinling's water fort (a line of ships guarding Jinling's moat), using fire rafts. When the wind rose, they lit the ships on fire and sent them at the fort. They then followed the rafts, storming the fort and beheading several thousand men. When Pan Mei reached the Qinhuai River, a Southern Tang army of more than a hundred thousand troops was arrayed with its back to Jinling. Pan had no boats, so he charged across the water leading his own bodyguard forward. The rest of the imperial army followed and the Southern Tang forces were badly defeated. A Southern Tang force sent to cut the pontoon bridge at Caishi was also defeated at that time.[16]

While Pan Mei was establishing himself near Jinling, Cao Bin began to set up a cordon around the capital to isolate it from outside help. In this first phase, the Song army mostly concerned itself with clearing out and securing the immediate environs of Jinling. Various positions were overrun and several Tang forces were shattered, both by active search and destroy missions, and by defending Song positions. A staggering number of men were beheaded in and after

these battles, demonstrating that Cao was most concerned in quickly and permanently stamping out any Tang resistance. The Song army maintained a high tempo of operations, with victory after victory, large and small, into June.

The Song army and its allied Wuyue force continued their successes through July 975, with their strategic surprise ramifying into tactical surprise as the Tang leadership failed to coordinate its response to the invading troops. Tang units were isolated and defeated in detail, and Jinling itself cut off from outside help. It took several months to establish the Song position, and the Tang army had been eliminated with ruthless brutality wherever possible. This was a hard-fought, vicious campaign directed at eliminating the Tang army in the field. The political effects of these military victories, however, were disappointing, as the Tang court seemed as intransigent as it had been before the invasion.

The Southern Tang ruler had left all of the affairs of the kingdom to his two close advisors, Chen Qiao and Zhang Ji. They had ordered all of the cities and forts to defend themselves firmly in order to wear out the Song army, reasonably countering the Song's war of annihilation strategy with that of a war of attrition. By July of 975 though, it should have been clear to them that their strategy was not working. Even if the Song army had withdrawn at that point, it would have taken the Tang army and navy a long time to recover from the mauling it had received. That, of course, was a military problem, which was out of their control. Their political problem was much more firmly in hand as they had not even disturbed the Southern Tang ruler when the Song army invaded. He remained in a back garden with Buddhist monks and Daoist masters reading sutras and discussing *The Book of Changes*. Chen and Zhang decided which military reports to show him. The Southern Tang ruler was still unaware that the Song army was besieging Jinling several months after it had surrounded the city.

All of the old generals had died, leaving Huangfu Jixun in charge

of Tang military affairs. Huangfu was young and arrogant, and, although he wanted his ruler to quickly surrender, he realized that he could not directly broach this issue with him, and said nothing. When he spoke to anyone else, however, he emphasized how powerful the Song army was. Even so, by 11 July, the Southern Tang ruler had clearly begun to suspect that all was not well, and he personally went out on the city walls and examined the situation. He found the Song army's stockades outside of the walls and their banners filling the fields. It was then that he realized that he was being deceived by his attendants and began to be concerned about the situation. He had Huangfu Jixun executed.[17]

The Southern Tang ruler ordered a force of one hundred thousand troops based upstream at Hukou to relieve the capital. Its commander balked at complying, seeing the dangers of confronting the Song army. Another commander refused to take over and carry out the order.[18] The Southern Tang ruler repeated the order several times without convincing the force to move, thus demonstrating that the Tang court's political weakness and the Song army's strength had combined to undermine the Tang military situation. No commander could be politically induced to engage in a risky military adventure for the sake of the Tang court.

On 21 August 975, Taizu personally wrote an edict to the Southern Tang ruler demanding that he surrender, and ordered his generals to slow down their attack while he waited for a reply. By September, however, Taizu was tired of war, and beginning to doubt whether the campaign would be successful. He was considering ordering Cao Bin to pull back to Huangling to rest the men and horses. A disgraced officer in the capital for his trial was brought before the emperor on his friend, Lu Duosun's, recommendation. After a private interview with the officer, Taizu decided to continue the campaign, and pardoned the officer for his information.[19]

When the Song army began its invasion, one of its objectives was to take Jingkou, which was protected by Runzhou. After repeated

defeats of Southern Tang forces, and bitter internal squabbling, Runzhou surrendered on 23 October. The Southern Tang ruler was inclined to surrender when the edict from Taizu arrived, but his advisors opposed it. They believed that not only had the Song army failed to capture Jinling, but that it had also withdrawn somewhat. The perceived withdrawal had been due to Taizu's orders to his troops while he hoped the Tang would surrender. Once the edict was rejected, the Song army resumed its offensive.

Having failed to slow the Song army on the battlefield, the Southern Tang court hoped to stop the invasion through clever diplomacy. This was a quixotic notion that highlighted the fundamental strategic incompetence of the Tang leadership. The Southern Tang court does not appear to have understood what was, in fact, going on. Perhaps, they were playing for time in the hope that their attritional strategy might succeed if given more time. Once the Song offensive had resumed, however, any negotiating space had effectively collapsed. A high official and a "Daoist" (who often discussed the *The Book of Changes* at the Southern Tang court) were sent to the Song court to convince Taizu to stop his campaign. The Southern Tang ruler personally wrote a more than ten-page letter to Taizu asking to stop the war and expressing his desire to retire due to illness. Cao Bin duly had this embassy escorted to Kaifeng on 6 November. Both the official and the Daoist failed to convince Taizu to change his plans, and they returned on 9 November.[20]

The Southern Tang ruler sent another envoy to seek a delay in the Song advance on 24 November, but the following day, a massive relief force sailed from Hukou to relieve the siege of Jinling. It was falsely claimed to be one hundred and fifty thousand men strong. Huge transport rafts for soldiers and massive warships with a thousand men each sailed for the pontoon bridge at Caishi. The Yangzi was shallow at that time of the year and ships could not easily advance. The armada's flagship alone was ten stories high. A Song force attacked it when it reached Huankou. In desperation, the Southern Tang fleet

tried to spread flaming oil on the river to recover the initiative. Unfortunately, a north wind arose and drove the oil back onto the Southern Tang ships, scattering them. The entire Tang force, Jinling's last hope for outside help, broke up, essentially dooming Jinling and the Southern Tang.[21]

The Southern Tang ruler sent the same official and the Daoist to Taizu again on 8 December, and again they failed to achieve anything. Yet, Jinling also continued to hold out, despite the destruction of the last serious relief force. A major Southern Tang force was defeated at Hukou on 17 December, showing that significant Tang field forces were still active. Even the besieged forces in Jinling attempted a major sally in December, though it too was defeated. The Song army had besieged Jinling from spring to winter, it had defeated the Southern Tang army several times, and the morale of the people in Jinling had collapsed. Cao Bin wanted the city to surrender, and he knew that if he took the city by storm, it would be impossible to keep the army from destroying it. He sent an ultimatum to the Southern Tang ruler that the city had to surrender by 27 December. While the Southern Tang ruler prevaricated, Cao attended to another urgent matter. He extracted a pledge from his generals that no one in the city would be killed when it fell.[22]

By 2 January 976, morale in Jinling had collapsed completely. After an interview with the Southern Tang ruler, Chen Qiao hung himself. Zhang Xi chose the opposite course and pledged to serve his ruler when he went to the Song court. Cao Bin arrayed the army in front of the palace wall. The Southern Tang ruler then presented his letter of surrender and, with his officials, bowed in welcome at the gate. Cao selected one thousand elite troops to guard the outside of the gate. The victory over the Southern Tang was reported on 5 January 976. In total, the Song took nineteen prefectures, containing three commanderies and one hundred and eight counties. The population was 655,065 households.[23] Taizu had now completely conquered southern China. Only the Northern Han and the Sixteen

Prefectures remained unconquered in north China.

The situation on the northern border had changed somewhat over the course of the Southern Tang campaign. Taizu's initial peace feelers with the Liao had borne some fruit, and what might have been something of a temporary expedient to secure the north while campaigning in the south, was becoming a more stable diplomatic relationship. Regardless of who initiated the contacts, both sides were clearly interested enough in pursuing some kind of regular, peaceful relationship to repeatedly exchange diplomatic missions. The Northern Han ruler was so disturbed by this that he was only narrowly dissuaded from actually attacking the Liao to register his displeasure. He had good reason to be concerned, since the continued existence of his kingdom was predicated upon Liao military support. This new political development necessarily weakened that support.

The Song–Liao relationship was not a simple one. Peace between the two empires apparently did not mean that the Song would not attempt to destroy the Northern Han, or that, if the Song did so, that the Liao would not aid the Northern Han. In that sense, whatever agreements they did make did not shift certain conflicts from the military to the political realm. Taizu and his Liao counterpart created a political channel of communication where there had not been one before. This did not remove the military forum for dispute resolution, it simply added another possibility. Nevertheless, this modest beginning would be the foundation of the future Song–Liao diplomatic regime. In all future military clashes, it would now be possible to negotiate a settlement based upon a pre-existing relationship. Of course, that would have to wait for the resolution of the military question, that is, the test of arms that would clarify the military balance of power. In practical terms, this would determine the border between the two empires, as well as the nature of their diplomatic relationship. But this could not be decided on a purely political basis before both sides came to their respective conclusions regarding the military balance of power. That would be worked out over the reigns

of Taizu's successors.

The beginning of the Song's political relationship with the Liao mirrored internal developments with regard to military and political power. In embarking upon a diplomatic relationship with the Liao, Taizu shifted from a purely military stance to one that offered an alternative. This was quite reasonable of him since he knew that, unlike the various kingdoms he had conquered and the Northern Han, he could not expect to destroy the Liao empire. Certainly, a stronger military posture would facilitate his political dealings, but until both sides decided for themselves not to resort to war, military and political factors could not be fully separated. In the same way, Taizu was still an emperor whose power was inseparably military and political. As he approached the endgame of the military phase of empire building, however, his power and interests would increasingly become political. That directly threatened Kuangyi's position, since he had become the single most powerful political actor in the regime after Zhao Pu's departure.

Taizu saw the impending clash of his interests and Kuangyi's, but he was not sure what to do about it. Kuangyi's ambitions had probably long been clear to Taizu, and he had actually harnessed them in creating the dynasty. To do so, however, he had been forced to dangle the possibility of emperorship before Kuangyi, a dangerous game to be sure. For his own sake and to keep Kuangyi's support, Taizu had not officially appointed his son Dezhao heir-apparent. He had tried to buy off Kuangyi's ambitions with titles, and even substantial power, but he could not be sure that his brother had been satisfied. Indeed, it seems that he began to realize the hole he had dug himself into in Kaifeng, placing his brother in charge of the environs of the capital and the central government. And it must be remembered that in all of his considerations, Taizu was torn between dealing with his brother as the faithful family member who had helped him build his dynasty, and as an ambitious pretender to the throne. Yet the problem remained, how was he to disarm his brother and position Dezhao to succeed without

killing or disgracing Kuangyi?

A possible solution was to move the capital to Luoyang. Quite apart from the political value of escaping Kaifeng, Luoyang had both sentimental value, since Taizu was born and grew up there, and symbolic value, as the capital of several earlier dynasties. In addition, Luoyang was better situated defensively than Kaifeng was, and so was less exposed to the possibility of cavalry raids from the steppe. This last consideration convinced some later historians that the decision ultimately not to move the capital to Luoyang was a critical error that led, or at least contributed substantially to, the loss of north China in 1127 when Kaifeng fell to a Jurchen army. Taizu set out for Luoyang accompanied by Kuangyi and his court, arriving there on 16 April 976. Moving the capital to Luoyang was not a new idea of his, though his trip there emphasized how seriously he was considering it. Even before he left, Li Fu had argued against it, giving eight reasons why it was a bad idea, but all of his objections were all minor and reparable. After arriving, Li Huaizhong raised the more important issue of the transport problems involved in supplying several hundred thousand troops at Luoyang. Kaifeng was connected by water to the Huai and Yangzi Rivers, making food shipments easy. Luoyang was not nearly as well connected. But Taizu was unimpressed by these objections as well.

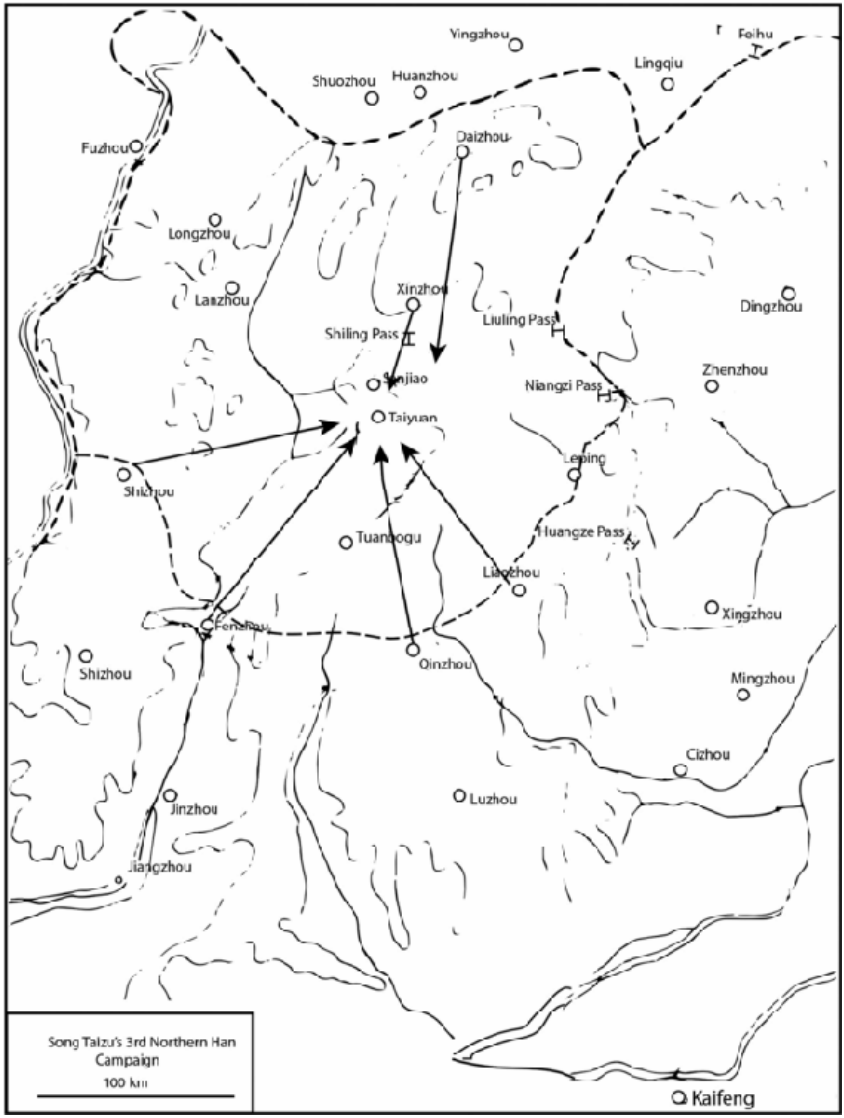
Kuangyi was finally able to dissuade him from moving the capital on his second attempt. In response to Taizu's justification that, "My intention to move [the capital] west is nothing other than wanting to use the advantages of the mountains and rivers to do away with the superfluous troops to follow the ancient practice of the Zhou and Han [dynasties] to make the empire peaceful." To that, Kuangyi replied, "It (defense) lies in virtue, not in strategic passes (*zai de, bu zai xian*)." After Kuangyi withdrew, Taizu commented to his attendants that, "The King of Jin's (Kuangyi) speech was extremely good, [I will] now forebear and follow it…" Taizu and his court returned to Kaifeng shortly thereafter.[24]

Like so many anecdotes in the Song sources, the exchange can be read on many levels. The most obvious reading of it, as simply the story of how the capital was not moved to Luoyang, misses most of the significance of the event. At the very least, Taizu's planned move to Luoyang and related decrease of the army would have profoundly altered the nature of the Song government. Military expenditures averaged seventy percent of the government's annual budget by one estimate, exclusive of the extraordinary costs incurred by invasions or expeditions.[25] Moving the government to Luoyang would have greatly decreased the government's annual military expenditures. Luoyang's more defensible position would also have placed the Song in a stronger defensive stance, but weakened its offensive posture. While these considerations played a part in Taizu's decision, it is curious that it was Kuangyi's statement that "It lies in virtue, not in strategic passes" which convinced him not to move the capital. Kuangyi's point was that the preservation of the dynasty was a political, rather than a military, issue.

It was only after Kuangyi withdrew that Taizu was able to digest the full significance of his brother's statement: that he would have to rely upon the virtue of those in government, in particular Kuangyi, to continue his dynasty. Moving the capital to Luoyang would not change the political realities that existed within the government itself, and military solutions would not solve the political problem that they both confronted. Taizu may actually have taken Kuangyi to mean more specifically that he could personally be trusted to act correctly, whereas mountain passes could not prevent misdeeds. If this interpolation seems too speculative, one should note that in the absence of a political context, Kuangyi's statement is basically nonsense. Taizu would hardly have been convinced by platitudes that argued that abstract morality was more important than concrete military realities.

After returning from Luoyang, Taizu returned to the military realities that the conquest of the Southern Tang had left him with. He

had already promoted his brothers, sons, and highest officials, as well as making Cao Bin Military Affairs Commissioner, but one city in the Southern Tang's territory, Jiangzhou, was still fighting even after receiving its former ruler's letter to surrender. Cao Han besieged it from winter into summer before it fell on 22 May 976. It had been a long and bitterly fought siege, with great loss of life. When Cao's troops entered the city, they proceeded to plunder the populace. When people complained to the prefect about the Song troops, Cao, furious at the temerity of a populace that had so bitterly resisted complaining about his soldiers, ordered the city put to the sword. Tens of thousands of people were slaughtered, and their bodies filled all the wells and pits in the city, with the remainder thrown into the Yangzi. Sadly, the messenger that Taizu had specially dispatched to prohibit Cao from slaughtering the inhabitants had been held up from crossing the Yangzi by adverse winds and arrived too late. Unlike Wang Quanbin and his comrades, however, Cao Han was not punished, although he did spend all of the loot he had collected on transporting five hundred iron luohan images from Mount Lu's Donglinsi on more than ten huge ships to new Buddhist shelters in Yingzhou.[26]



17. Song Taizu's third Northern Han campaign

With the Southern Tang finally completely pacified, and a developing diplomatic dialogue with the Liao proceeding, the only remaining military target was the Northern Han. Raiding and counter-raiding with the Northern Han had continued without break throughout the Southern Tang campaign and after, though without Liao support, Han raids were a nuisance rather than a serious threat. The Northern Han was in a precarious military and diplomatic position, with none of the three players involved entirely certain what

to expect from the others. There was a limit to what dialogue could accomplish between the Song and Liao in the abstract, but Song–Liao diplomacy does seem to have lessened the chance that a Song invasion of the Northern Han would provoke a wider war with the Liao. Both sides agreed that peace was mutually advantageous, and that they did not agree upon the issue of the Northern Han. Any war that would result, then, would be a limited one, fought exclusively on Northern Han soil. This, of course, increased the chance of a Song invasion, since the possible negative consequences of such a campaign had been greatly reduced in severity. In the fall of 976, Taizu started his last campaign.

The third campaign against the Northern Han, and the death of Song Taizu (9 September 976–3 January 977)[27]

Taizu ordered an invasion of the Northern Han on 9 September 976, and the first Song troops crossed the border on 18 September in a concentric attack on widely separated Northern Han positions.[28] This concentric attack pinned down the Northern Han army in its various strongpoints, while making it dangerous, if not impossible, to dispatch a concentrated force from Taiyuan to deal with any of the Song armies. The difficulties of terrain removed any advantages of interior lines for the Northern Han army, preventing it from defeating individual Song forces in detail before shifting to deal with the others. Under those conditions, the strongest Northern Han forces had to remain in Taiyuan to defend the existence of the regime, allowing each Song column to easily break through the Northern Han's border defenses.

The main Song army under Dang Jin reached Taiyuan on 4 October, and defeated a Northern Han force of several thousand men north of the city. Dang then established a fort south of the Fen River.[29] The previous pattern of Northern Han campaigns asserted itself with Song forces capturing towns and forts, defeating Northern Han troops in the field, and Liao forces rushing to relieve Taiyuan. Just as the noose was tightening around Taiyuan, however, Song Taizu died in the Wansui Hall on 14 November 976.

Succession

When Taizu died, Empress Song sent the eunuch Wang Jien to get Taizu's son Defang. Her choice of messenger was a poor one, however, as, either because of a previous link, or because Wang rightly figured he would be well rewarded for doing so, he went, instead to find Kuangyi. The two of them returned through a snowy night to the palace. When Kuangyi arrived instead of Defang, Empress Song was alarmed, "Heaven's Son, my mother and children's fate is all entrusted to Heaven's Son." Kuangyi cried, saying, "[We] will all preserve fortune without grief."[30]

Li Tao's notes to the *Xu Zizhi Tongjian Changbian* express some frustration with the various accounts of whether Taizu intended for Kuangyi to succeed him or not, and the circumstances surrounding that succession. Writing in the twelfth century, Li was overwhelmed by the conflicting, error-ridden stories later recorded about Taizu's death and Kuangyi's summons, and constrained by concerns of *lese majeste* from even implying that the succession was illegitimate. Modern historians have been only somewhat less restrained. Liu Jingzhen understated the issue in commenting that, "Taizong's succession is a very suspicious case in Chinese history," but this was the most conservative way to point out that Kuangyi's succession was, at the very least, highly irregular.[31] Without direct evidence to prove any position, conflicting accounts written some time after the fact, and only enough corroborating evidence to disprove at least some aspect of every version of the events, it is almost impossible to conclude anything firmly.[32]

Probably the most important aspect of Kuangyi's irregular succession is that there must have been widespread suspicion of the circumstances surrounding it at the time. As we will see in the next chapter, Kuangyi, now more appropriately "Taizong," as he would be known posthumously, would struggle for legitimacy throughout his

entire reign because of the taint stemming from his succession. Contemporaries faced two obvious questions concerning the succession: first, did Taizong assassinate, presumably by poison, Taizu; and second, if Taizu had meant his brother to succeed him, why did he not ever explicitly say so? The first question has received some scholarly attention, but proving poisoning at a remove of a thousand years is impossible. Suffice it to observe that Taizong certainly had the means, and motives, to do so. Indeed, I would argue that Taizu's trip to Luoyang may have convinced Taizong to kill him. Taizong saw that his window of opportunity for taking the throne was closing as Taizu began considering ways to break free of his power. The legitimacy of taking the throne in preference to his nephews was already suspect, since both Dezhao and Defang were grown men. As they grew older, there would be even less reason for a brother to brother, rather than a father to son, succession.

Taizu never explicitly indicated who he wanted to succeed him. As I have argued earlier, this was part of his delicate balancing act of maintaining Taizong's support for the dynasty by dangling the possibility that he might one day become emperor. In the event, that possibility created enough ambiguity to allow Taizong to seize the throne. Taizong then promoted first his younger brother Guangmei, and then his son, the future Zhenzong, through the same series of posts he had held in order teleologically to establish that that was the path which indicated the heir-apparent. By proceeding through these efforts as they were enacted, however, their contemporary political meaning as attempts at self-legitimation are more clear. And at this juncture, I should explain why I continue to hold off the story of Taizu's pledge to his mother on her deathbed that he would pass the throne to Taizong. Li Tao placed this, I believe apocryphal, story in 961, when it was purported to have taken place. If Taizu made this promise, and it was copied down and stored by Zhao Pu, then it seems that only Taizu and Zhao Pu knew of its existence. Taizong clearly had no idea that there was any written evidence that would have

supported his claims to the throne, since he made no mention of it when he took the throne. This would have lent great credibility to his succession, and allayed the suspicions of the officials and the imperial family. Thus, in the unlikely event that Taizu had made such a promise, Zhao Pu chose not to make it known in 976. As a historical document, the promise only appeared in 981, when Zhao briefly returned to government.

Taizu's death was not just the end of the most intense period of Song expansion, it was also in many ways, the true end of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. Unlike Taizong, Taizu was fundamentally a general who understood the political requirements of rulership. His political and military strength were one and the same, and in that sense, he was still a warlord, albeit one who had gone a considerable way towards realizing the imperial dignity. Taizu had overseen the displacement of his own cohort of military men while simultaneously building an immense empire. This virtuoso display of political and military acumen does much to explain why the Song did not become the sixth short-lived dynasty in north China in the tenth century. Taizu was able to overthrow the Later Zhou, establish the Song, and create a vast empire by conquest, because he was part of a group of powerful generals originally constituted to bolster Zhou Shizong's rule. This group formed the apex of a vast political–military complex that Taizu was able, over time, to take control of, manipulate, and institutionalize as his own dynasty. He was a master of military politics, and his legacy was not just unmatchable martial accomplishments, but also a group of military families entrenched in the imperial family. Taizong would find his power diminished and threatened by both of these legacies.

[1] Jiang Fucong, "Song Taizu shi Taizong yu Zhao Pu de Zhengzhang," Shixue Huikan 5/3 (1973), p. 5.

[2] Wang Fuzhi, Songlun, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964, p. 32.

[3] XCB 5.125–6. Cited in Zhang Qifan, *Songchu Zhengzhi Tanyuan*, p. 33, and passim; Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p. 517.

[4] XCB 14.303.

[5] XCB 14.306–7.

[6] Jiang Fucong, “Song Taizu shi Taizong yu Zhao Pu de Zhengzhang,” Shixue Huikan 5/3 (1973), p.14.

[7] XCB 12.272–3.

[8] LS 8.94. A Liao envoy was sent to the Song court in May of the next year, see, LS 8.95.

[9] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 193–210.

[10] XCB 15.324.

[11] XCB 15.325.

[12] XCB 15.327.

[13] XCB 15.328.

[14] XCB 15.329.

[15] XCB 15.329–30.

[16] XCB 16.334.

[17] XCB 16.340–1.

[18] XCB 16.341.

[19] XCB 16.343–4.

[20] XCB16.346–48.

[21] XCB 16.349.

[22] One of Cao Bin’s distinguishing characteristics as a general was his consistent restraint of his troops from unnecessary killing. He proved this during the conquest of Shu, where his troops were the only ones who did not get out of control, and in the conquest of the Southern Tang. He was specifically chosen to lead the Southern Tang campaign because of his restraint. Cao’s capture of the Southern Tang capital was an exemplary display of this. See his biography in SS 258.8977–8983. He became Taizu’s accompanying military official in the afterlife when he died, joining Zhao Pu, who was Taizu’s accompanying civil official.

[23] XCB 16.351–3.

[24] XCB 17.369–70. Zhao Kuangyi was quoting the great Warring States Period minister, general and military thinker Wu Qi, as recounted in Sima Qian’s *Shiji* biography of Wu Qi.

[25] Hon-chiu Wong, “Government Expenditures in Northern Sung China (960–1127),” Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975, pp. 60–1, citing Cai Xiang’s estimate for 1064.

[26] XCB 17.370–1.

[27] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 210–12.

[28] XCB 17.374–5.

[29] XCB 17.376.

[30] Sima Guang, *Sushui Jiwen*, 1.19.

[31] Liu Jingzhen, *Huangdi he Tamen de Quanli: Beisong Qianqi*, p. 62.

[32] For a full account of the historiographical problems of the succession, see Peter Lorge, “Sima Guang on Song Taizong: Politics, History and Historiography,” Journal of Song-Yuan Studies, 42 (2012), 5–43.

8

Fighting to become emperor

> "Taizong of the Song knew he lacked virtue so he gathered literati to produce the *Taiping Yulan*, *Taiping Guangji* and the *Wenyuan Yinghua*, three great books in order to do away with secret discussions among the people."
>
> – The Qianlong emperor[1]

Song Taizong possessed all of his older brother's ambitions and suspicions but almost none of his positive qualities. As a child he had no friends,[2] and as an adult he was a poor leader of men. Liu Jingzhen has characterized him as self-confident and self-reliant, but I think a more accurate assessment would be arrogant and insecure.[3] All of these qualities, combined with an energetic constitution, led Taizong to attempt to read every document and make every decision necessary for the operations of government. The immense quantities of paper generated by the Song bureaucracy inevitably defeated him in this project, though he continued heroically trying to master it until his death. The central irony of Taizong's reign was that the more he succeeded in centralizing the power of government and increasing the authority of the emperor, the less any individual emperor, no matter how energetic, could control that power by himself. Taizong thus unintentionally presided over the shift of the *de jure* nearly absolute imperial power to the *de facto* control of a rapidly professionalizing bureaucracy.

Many of the policies pursued by Taizong that undermined the *de facto* powers of the emperor were attempts to overcome his own weak political position within the Song regime. He lacked both Taizu's immense military prestige as well as his personal connections to the most powerful men in the dynasty. Indeed, Taizu's sudden death and

Taizong's suspicious succession left many of those power-holders quite leery of the new emperor. Nor were these men who could be easily disposed of, since they were firmly connected to the army and married into the imperial family. Taizong had very little political room to maneuver when he took the throne, constrained, as he was, by family and lack of credibility. As we shall see, Taizong enacted various institutional policies as immediate political expedients to compensate for his weakness, which later came to be considered defining aspects of Song government. One of the best examples of this is Taizong's vast expansion of the use of the civil service exam system to recruit bureaucrats for the Song government. As I noted earlier, Taizu made relatively little use of the exam system during his reign, and doubted the quality of the men so recruited. Facing a bureaucracy loyal more to his brother than to the Song emperor, Taizong needed to recruit new men into the government without previous ties. He passed nearly as many men his first year as Taizu had during his entire sixteen years on the throne, and continued to graduate large numbers of men for the rest of his reign. Ironically, although he promoted vast numbers of bureaucrats advanced through the exam system, he never fully trusted them. But then, he never fully trusted anyone.

Shortly after taking the throne, Taizong acted to bolster his implicit claim that his succession was part of a legitimate older brother-younger brother succession by promoting his own younger brother Guangmei, now called Tingmei, to Governor of Kaifeng, as well as promoting Taizu's two son's, Dezhao and Defang. This created the impression that the succession would run from Taizong to Tingmei, and then down to the senior members of the next generation, Dezhao and Defang. If this held true, then Taizong was actually following correct Song practice. Two months later, he decreed that Taizu and Tingmei's sons were all imperial sons, and their daughters, imperial daughters.[4] Soon after that, he brought many of the dynasty's elder statesmen, Zhao Pu, Zhang Yongde, Xiang Gong, Gao Huaide, to court. All of the highest-ranking officials in the court, Xue Juzheng,

Shen Yilun, Lu Duosun, Cao Bin, and Pan Mei were retained and promoted. These were all political acts designed to reassure all of the dynasty's vested interests, and to try to obtain their support. The one off note was Taizong's inexplicable decision to change the reign period before the end of the year.[5] Usually, a new emperor would rule under the reign period of his predecessor until the beginning of the next year, when he would start his own. This sudden and unexpected change made Taizong seem impatient to be emperor and disrespectful of his brother.

Even before the army was recalled from the field, Taizong sent envoys to the Liao court to announce Taizu's death. In so doing, he was not acting to continue their diplomatic relationship, something he would soon destroy, but rather to bolster his new status. The Liao accepted his envoys and sent some of their own to demonstrate their acknowledgement of the situation, though they clearly believed that he had usurped the throne.[6] From the Liao perspective, the Song succession was not, in and of itself, of much interest. Taizong was a somewhat known quantity, as he had met with the Liao envoys during his older brother's reign, but his intentions with regard to Song–Liao relations were not clear. His dispatch of envoys was slightly encouraging, and the Liao refrained from trying to take advantage of the uncertain political situation through military action. Had the Liao ever really thought to destroy the Song, Taizong's succession would have been a good opportunity, particularly considering that troops had already been mobilized to assist the Northern Han. Yet just as the Liao had held off from combining with the southern Chinese kingdoms to limit or conquer the Song, they made no attempt to exploit this moment of Song political turbulence. This would contrast sharply with their actions after Taizong invaded Liao territory in 979.

Two factors drove Taizong to invade first the Northern Han and then the Liao in 979. First, there was the perceived historical imperative to "recover" the territory of the Northern Han and the Sixteen Prefectures ceded to the Liao by Shi Jingtang. At the very

least, the Northern Han continued to be a troublesome neighbor that had to be dealt with. Second, despite his attempts to legitimate his succession, Taizong remained insecure and politically weak. This is rather ironic, given that, once he had pushed Zhao Pu out of the government, Taizong had become the most politically powerful man in the regime after Taizu. Taizong had always been strongest in the political sphere, not the least because Taizu and Zhao Pu had acted so strongly to exclude him from gaining influence over the army, but his power was predicated on the exclusion of all other power-holders except Taizu from the military sphere. Taizu had allowed his brother freer rein in politics because it was the army which really controlled the fate of the dynasty. As emperor, Taizu had maintained his position and power by dominating the army, and fragmenting the power of the lesser military power-holders. Taizong now had to build his own control of the army and prevent any of the previously scattered power-holders from increasing their hold over the levers of power. In theory, the emperor had absolute authority over the army, but the institutions of the Song were still nascent, and Taizu had ruled by his personal credibility. Taizu's neglect of institutions now told against Taizong as he tried to consolidate his position. He could not expect obedience, particularly because of his suspicious succession, and he would have to find a way to prove himself worthy of ruling.

Taizong quickly realized that politics alone could not legitimate his rule, since Taizu had not explicitly given him the political or institutional support to succeed him. He was thus forced to turn to military adventure to legitimate his rule. This effort proved that war was still important in politics, not only because it was the one thing Taizong could do to prove himself a worthy ruler, but also because his failures on the battlefield weakened him so severely in the political sphere. His military incompetence amplified the questions over his succession, leading to what was certainly a coup attempt. And indeed, he had created many of the conditions for the coup himself by retaining and increasing the status of his brother and nephews.

Taizong was forced to promote Tingmei, Dezhao, and Defang in order to make his own succession appear legitimate, or at least possibly legitimate. This had the unfortunate side effect of implying that all male members of the immediate imperial family, the patrilineal descendants of Taizu, Taizong, and Tingmei's mother and father, were all legitimate candidates for the Song throne. What then distinguished Taizong, who was clearly not well liked by the regime's power-holders? Taizong could only break out of this trap by military accomplishment. He tried and failed, not only precipitating an immediate crisis, but also creating a chronic military problem that continued to undermine his rule until his death. He also realized that he would have to kill Tingmei, Dezhao, and Defang, and eliminate the possibility of any other line of succession apart from his own descendants. These ruthless acts to secure his throne were unavoidable, though they must have confirmed in the minds of many that he had killed Taizu. Hamstrung on the larger political stage, he was forced to wield power by direct control of the day to day running of the government. Indeed, as his military fortunes declined, he took more detailed control of military operations as well.

The military situation that confronted Taizong in 976 was quite simple, and it took no particular acumen to understand that the easiest target was the Northern Han. Taizu's last campaign against the Northern Han, at least as far as it got, had not seemed to provoke the Liao into an all-out Song–Liao war. It might therefore be possible for Taizong to win a relatively easy victory and establish his bona fides as emperor. His interest in conquering the Northern Han was two-fold, for internal political purposes and for the abstract notion of "reconquering" the territory of the Tang empire. The dovetailing of these two concerns, as so frequently happens in politics, where the political value of military action is filtered through a cultural prism, led Taizong to begin military preparations on the border as early as the winter of 977. At the same time, he continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the Liao.

Taizong may well have understood that the political value of the campaign was far more important than the territorial value of the Northern Han's territory. His subsequent behavior in immediately continuing on to attack the Sixteen Prefectures suggests that political concerns were paramount. Taizong desperately needed an unambiguous military victory for his own legitimacy, a much more pressing issue than the continued existence of the Northern Han. Had he been more concerned with territorial acquisition, it would have made more sense to consolidate control over the newly conquered territory before undertaking any new activities. This reading must remain tentative given the possibility that Taizong's behavior was simply either unwise, caused by his lack of military acumen, rash, or both.

The Liao received regular reports of Song activities from the Northern Han, sent supplies to the Han, and also continued diplomatic relations with the Song. It was clear that they were headed toward a military confrontation over the Northern Han, but how it would play out was uncertain. They had already established some sort of peace treaty (whose provisions remain obscure), though at what point is unclear, and these political ties might complicate or at least constrain the results of the battlefield. The Liao court may have been unaware of the internal political dynamics that were driving Taizong not only to military adventure, but also to a belligerent position in relations between the two courts. While the Liao understood the Song's "cultural" claims to the Northern Han's territory, they may have imagined that the Song court would have set aside such vague cultural concerns, since they were unsupported by any real history of ownership, in favor of the practical interest in maintaining Song–Liao peace.

Domestic political concerns, however, rapidly overwhelmed whatever conciliatory urges Taizong might have had. Where Taizu, a consummate warrior and proven general, could take a less belligerent stance with regard to the Liao and not diminish his military credibility

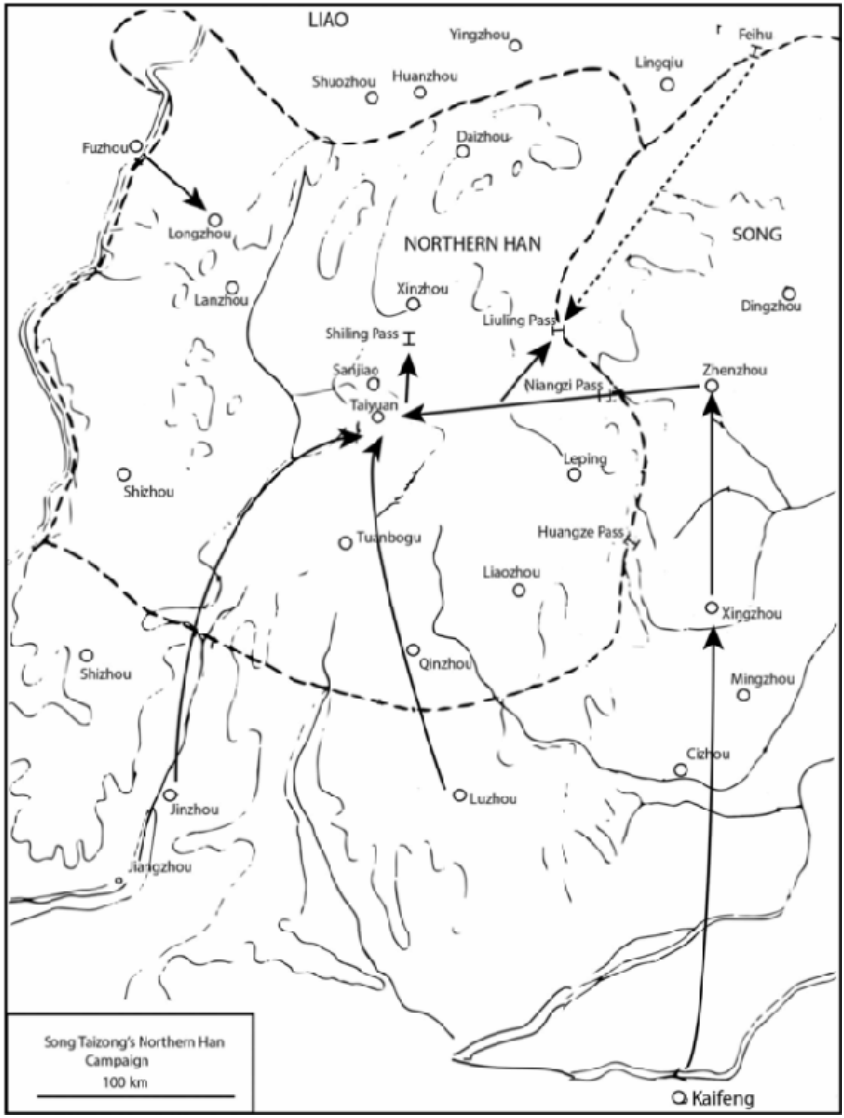
or political authority, Taizong had to adopt an uncompromisingly martial policy in order to establish his political authority. In trying to get out from under Taizu's long military shadow, Taizong attempted to "out martial" his older brother. The problem was clear even before he launched his Northern Han campaign. Taizong compelled Chen Hongjin to cede his satrapy in Fujian to the Song in 978, and shortly thereafter, pressured the kingdom of Wuyue to submit its territory as well.[7] Neither of these minor political accomplishments helped Taizong's stature as emperor because the submission of both kingdoms was the natural product of Taizu's military victories, rather than anything Taizong had done. In effect, Taizong found himself cleaning up various loose ends left by Taizu's death, instead of setting out his own policy and demonstrating his own qualities as a ruler. For a man who could not even wait a few months before changing the reign period, it was impossible to accept merely continuing his brother's policies. Ironically, his claim to be Taizu's legitimate successor would have been improved by the dutiful carrying out of his brother's policies, rather than by breaking with them. Taizong's interest in establishing his own legitimacy was the primary driver in launching the campaign so early in his reign.

The Northern Han campaign (4 February –19 June 979)[8]

On 4 February 979, Song encroachment on Northern Han territory, and its military buildup in obvious preparation for a major invasion, prompted the Liao to send an envoy to the Song court to ask for an explanation.[9] Taizong asked Cao Bin about conquering the Northern Han on 6 February:

> Zhou Shizong and our Taizu both personally went to Taiyuan. At that time they were not strong enough to take it. Was the reason that they could not get close to it due to the strength and integrity of its walls and ramparts?
>
> Cao replied: 'During Shizong's campaign Shichao was defeated at Shilingguan. People were afraid and therefore they withdrew. Taizu had camped his soldiers within an area of sweet grass [thus moist and swampy] and many soldiers in the army suffered from diarrhea. It was because of this that they stopped, and were unable to get close to the city walls.'
>
> Taizong said: 'I now intend to attack Taiyuan. What do you think?'
>
> Cao replied: 'The country's armor and weapons are sharp and the people's hearts are happy and support you. If you attack, it will be [as easy as] breaking dried branches or pulling up rotted plants. How could you not succeed?'
>
> Grand Councilor Xue Juzheng objected, 'Previously when Shizong went to war, Taiyuan relied upon support from the north. They stayed within their walls and did not come out to fight, confident that the imperial army would tire and withdraw. Taizu defeated the enemy at Yanmenguan. He moved the people to the area between the Luo and Yellow Rivers, so that the territory is now empty and barren. The difficulties are great and what you would accomplish would be unimportant. There are insufficient food supplies. It will be a disaster. I beg Your Majesty to deeply consider this.'
>
> Taizong replied, 'Now the issue is the same but the situation is different. They are weak and we are strong. Previously, Taizu defeated the enemy, removing their people to empty the land just so we could take care of the matter today. I have made my decision. You officials should not speak of it again.' He then ordered that preparations be made to send military provisions from the various prefectures to Taiyuan.[10]

Taizong was determined not only to conquer the Northern Han, but also personally to lead the campaign and so prove his ability to rule through military success.



18. Song Taizong's Northern Han campaign

He made his command appointments on 9 February, and feasted the generals and the other officers on 14 February, at which time he personally handed them the campaign plans. He left the capital on 15 March 979, halting temporarily at Zhendingfu on 31 March while his armies secured the area around Taiyuan. Song forces spread out across Northern Han territory attacking cities and took up position to secure Shiling Pass, which the expected Liao relief force would pass through. As the Song army secured its positions in and around Taiyuan, the

Liao mustered and dispatched tens of thousands of cavalry to disrupt the Song siege. The Liao concentrated these troops into a single, powerful army, and sent it through Shiling Pass. Once past that point, it would break into the open terrain around Taiyuan where it would make Song operations impossible. Fortunately, from the Song perspective, the terrain north and west of Taiyuan tended to force any Liao army to pass through Shiling Pass. It would be much easier to defeat a cavalry army in a narrow pass, holding defensive positions. The Song army overwhelmingly defeated the Liao army when it reached Shiling Pass on 17 April, effectively deciding the outcome of the entire invasion. Liao casualties were extremely heavy and a number of high-ranking generals were killed. The defeat of the Liao seriously damaged the morale of Taiyuan.[11]

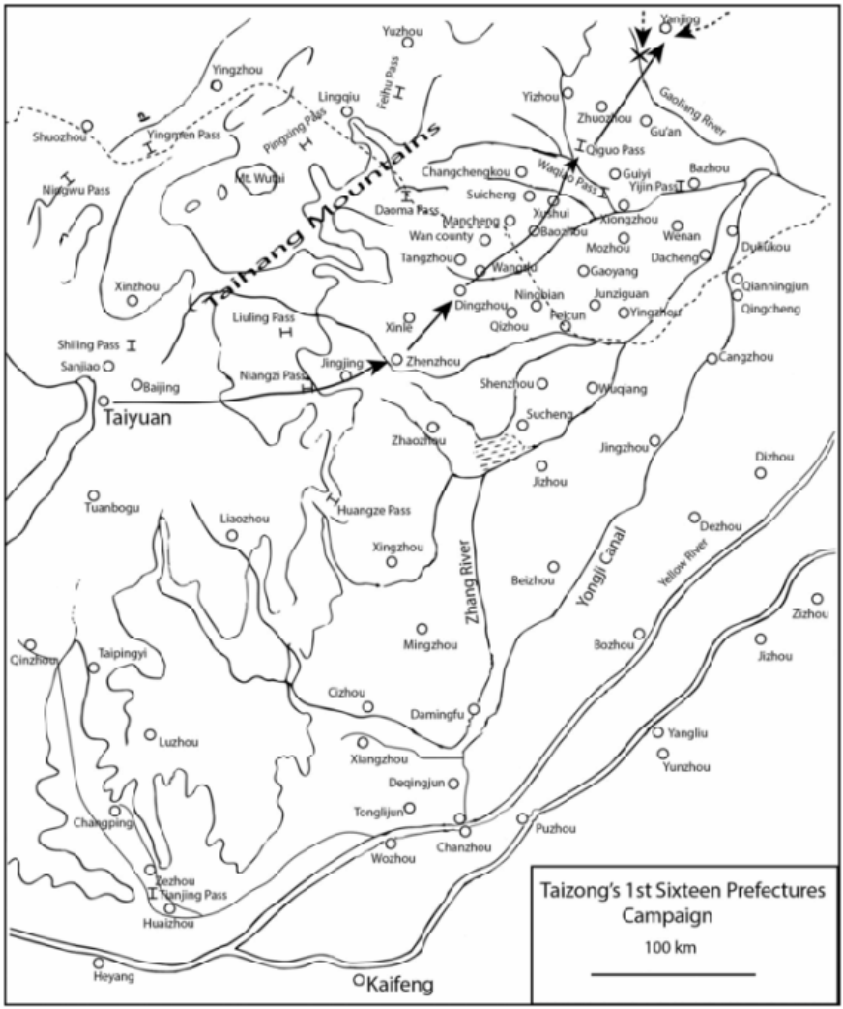
Despite the crushing victory over the Liao, the possibility remained of further Liao relief forces trying to aid Taiyuan, so Shiling Pass was reinforced. With the area around Taiyuan secured, Taizong continued his march, reaching Taiyuan on 20 May. He made a complete inspection tour, even dismounting to talk with the generals and soldiers operating the siege machinery. When he returned to his temporary palace, he issued an edict to Liu Jiyuan, the Northern Han ruler, promising to take care of Liu and his descendants if he surrendered. As the attack progressed, Taizong kept up a very visible presence supervising the siege. By 2 June 979, the Song army had nearly broken into the city, but Taizong pulled them back to give the Northern Han ruler the chance to surrender. The terms were negotiated that night. The conquest of the Northern Han added ten prefectures and one commandery, containing forty counties. It also added a population of thirty-five thousand families and thirty thousand troops.[12] Taiyuan's strategic importance was emphasized in Taizong's final act, the removal of its population and razing of the city on 15 June.[13]

The Sixteen Prefectures campaign (26 June 26–1 August 979)[14]

With Taiyuan destroyed, Taizong withdrew to Zhenzhou on 26 June. His first campaign as emperor was a success, which caused him to overestimate his own strategic sense and the strength of the Song army. Unlike his older brother, Taizong's campaign experience was fairly limited. He did not understand that, after some two to three months in the field, his troops were exhausted. They also expected to be rewarded for their success. Taizong not only failed to reward them, but, by razing Taiyuan, also prevented them from looting the city. These errors could have been corrected had Taizong been amenable to criticism or advice. He was not, and his generals knew it. Thus, when he decided to invade Liao territory immediately after the fall of Taiyuan, in order to capture the Sixteen Prefectures, no one opposed him.[15]

This precipitous and ill-advised campaign requires some explanation. As I discussed earlier, before the conquest of the Northern Han was even undertaken, Taizong had effectively conceded that much of the credit for a successful campaign would belong to Taizu, who had, after all put in place all of the measures that weakened the Northern Han. On top of that, Cao Bin had supported the campaign, implicitly garnishing much of Taizong's glory for the military in general, and Cao in particular. Ultimately then, Taizong must have felt that the conquest of the Northern Han had not yielded him sufficient glory for his political or personal purposes. Only by deciding himself upon a campaign which Taizu had no connection to, and which was not supported by the military, could Taizong prove himself in the military sphere. From his personal and political perspective, particularly because he was so ignorant of military realities, the risk of the campaign was worth the possible gain. Ironically, his well-known intolerance of criticism dissuaded any of

the generals from voicing their opposition, which was precisely what he would have needed to succeed in spite of in order to prove himself the martial equal of Zhou Shizong or Song Taizu. But given that the campaign was an unmitigated disaster, the point was moot.



19. Song Taizong's first Sixteen Prefectures campaign

Taizong advanced into Liao territory on 15 July 979 and continued on through Qigouguan, without opposition, the following day. Leaving behind a garrison in that city, Taizong proceeded on receiving the surrender of Zhuozhou on 17 July. The emperor reached Youzhou (the Liao southern capital, Yanjing, modern Beijing) before

dawn on 19 July, and personally led an attack on a Liao force of more than ten thousand men camped north of the city. The Song army beheaded more than a thousand men and drove off the rest. With the area around Youzhou secured, Taizong ordered his generals to attack the city from all sides. The Song army besieged Youzhou until 1 August, but despite Taizong's personal supervision of the siege, and eight hundred ballistae, the city did not capitulate.[16]

The battle at Gaoliang River (1 August 979)

A Liao army commanded by Yelü Sha attacked the Song at the Gaoliang River on 1 August 979. Yelü Sha's initial attack drove the Song back slightly. Xiu Ge and Xie Zhen then attacked from the flanks and routed the Song army. Taizong himself narrowly escaped the Liao army, fleeing to Zhuozhou on a donkey. The Liao killed or captured a large number of troops and took vast booty in weapons, armor, provisions, and other equipment.[17] The battle at Gaoliang River is absent from Song sources, as are all of the subsequent Liao victories. Although it is impossible to determine more than the most vague outlines of the battle, its impact on Taizong's campaign makes it clear that it was a rout. The Song expeditionary army collapsed and Taizong fled back to Kaifeng. While the initiative shifted to the Liao, the Song army adopted a defensive posture in preparation for a Liao invasion.

Taizong on the defensive[18]

According to Song sources, the army withdrew from Youzhou the night of 2 August because, due to the extended siege, the soldiers were ill, transport of supplies was difficult, and the Liao might come to relieve the city. Taizong's order to withdraw, if such an order was ever actually given, would have been irrelevant by the night of the second since the main army was already retreating. The emperor reached Dingzhou on 6 August 979, where he halted for a few days and established the command dispositions for defense against the Liao.[19] One night during Taizong's retreat, an alarm was raised within the army and, since the emperor could not be found, some unnamed individuals planned to set up Zhao Dezhao, Taizu's oldest son, who had accompanied the army to Youzhou, as emperor. This near coup was only averted when Taizong was located. Not surprisingly, the emperor was not pleased when he heard what had happened.[20] His military failure had very nearly resulted in his being overthrown and replaced by a much more legitimate-appearing candidate. Discontent within the army had not threatened the dynasty, only Taizong himself. He was therefore neither a necessary nor desirable ruler in the eyes of some; it is impossible to determine how widespread this sentiment was, while, at the same time, loyalty to the dynasty even in the face of a military disaster remained strong.

Taizong's defeat at the hands of the Liao was more than just a military failure, it was a personal humiliation. Taizong had set out to prove himself worthy to succeed his older brother by, if not equaling his military exploits, at least demonstrating that he was also a competent general. While it was true that he had destroyed the Northern Han, that victory was at least partly due to the measures instituted earlier by Taizu. Li Tao's account points out that all of the generals, except one, did not want to go but had been afraid to oppose Taizong in his decision to attack Youzhou following the fall of

Taiyuan.[21] The generals were afraid to oppose Taizong, and, for his part, the emperor began to blame the generals for the failures of his campaigns. He was also feeling increasingly threatened by his own family, particularly his nephews and younger brother, though he would soon also takes steps to punish his military in-laws as well.

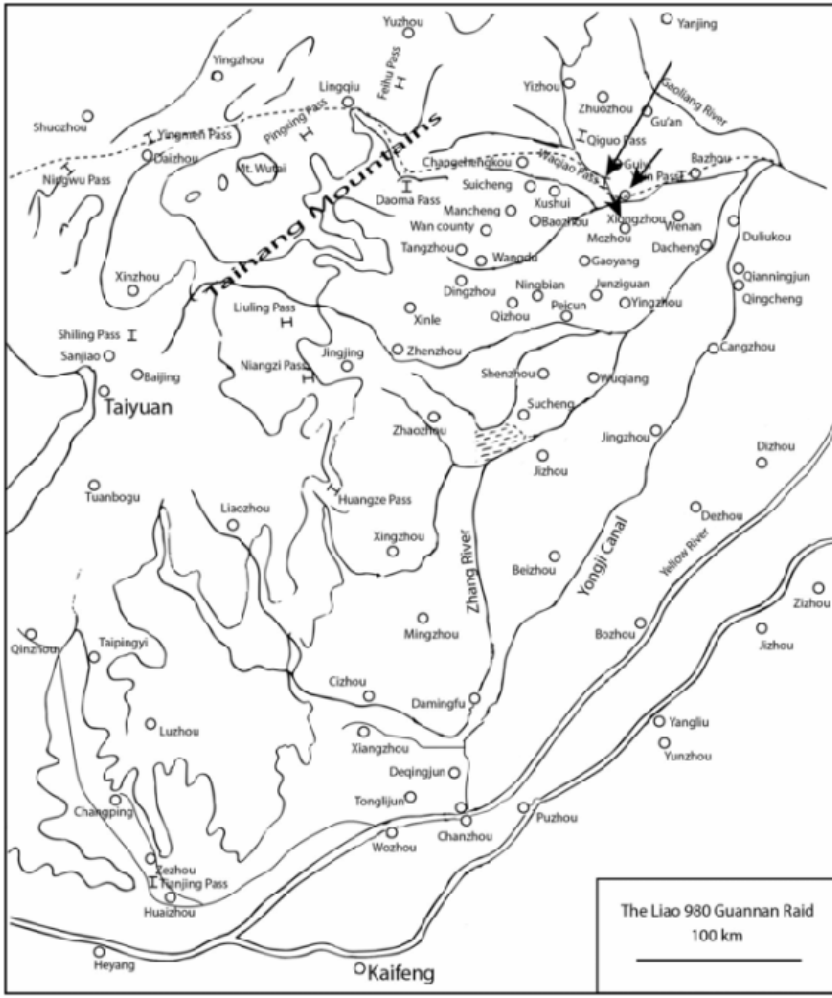
The first to pay the price for Taizong's military disgrace was Dezhao. At some point between 21 and 23 September 979, Dezhao brought up the issue of rewarding the troops for their efforts against the Northern Han, something which all the court officials had said could not be done. They were no doubt expressing Taizong's wishes, since the emperor wished to blame the troops for the subsequent disaster, and since to reward them so long after the campaign would have highlighted the fact that the emperor had failed to reward them earlier, when it was appropriate. Dezhao could also be seen to be expressing the military's position that they had not been rewarded and should be. Taizong was furious, "Wait until you can do it yourself (i.e., when you are emperor), it will not be too late to reward them." A frightened Dezhao then withdrew into the palace and committed suicide with a fruit knife.[22] Given the political situation, it is more likely that some agent or agents of Taizong "helped" Dezhao to "commit suicide." Taizong's position had become so unstable that he could no longer tolerate the presence of alternative candidates for the throne, particularly when they were favored by the military.

Although Taizong had personally withdrawn from the battlefield, the war with the Liao had just begun. The Liao characterized the attack at Gaoliang River as merely a "stroke with the flat of the sword."[23] They may well have been surprised by the magnitude of their victory. It is clear that they were not prepared to take immediate advantage of it. While the Liao mobilized, the Song continued to arrange their defenses.

The Liao army invaded Song territory on 23 October 979 soon coming into contact with the Song army at Mancheng. In a characteristic display of incompetent micro-management, Taizong

ordered the generals to use a specific battle array (*zhentu*) that divided their forces into eight formations, spaced one hundred paces apart. It was clear to the soldiers and generals alike that Taizong's array was a prescription for disaster. After some anxious discussion, the generals decided that it would be better to disobey the emperor's orders and win, than follow them and lose. The reorganized Song army then defeated the Liao army, chased it first to Xishan, and then to Suicheng. The Song beheaded more than ten thousand Liao troops and captured more than a thousand horses.[24]

The Liao counter-attacked on 11 November and decisively defeated the Song at Mancheng, and on 17 November defeated the Song at Huoshan.[25] But the campaign soon began to go poorly for the Liao. Song forces badly defeated the Liao on 26 November, just as they were establishing four stockades to support their raids. With military activity increasing on the border, Taizong could not allow himself to be perceived as uninvolved in the defense of the empire even as he continued to fall back to Daming. The following day, a Song army defeated a force of more than ten thousand Liao troops, beheading more than three thousand of them.[26] Taizong reached Damingfu on 11 December 979, at which time a report arrived that the Liao had withdrawn from Xiongzhou. The Song army defeated a Liao force of more than one thousand at Sanjiaokou on 15 December, and defeated another Liao force of several thousand at Xinzhou on 17 December.[27] The Liao made a final major push in late February, sending a hundred thousand troops against Yanmen. Pan Mei crushed the Liao force, killing a Liao military governor, and capturing the Liao Cavalry Commander in Chief.[28]



20. Liao 980 raid

Stalemate[29]

Military operations quieted down after February 980 while both sides gathered themselves for another major effort later in the year. The Song reinforced Guannan, Dingzhou, and Zhenzhou and, despite his stunning defeat at the Gaoliang River, Taizong made plans to tour the Northern border. He could not now afford to retreat from command of the army or appear to be afraid of facing the Liao with his military credibility so badly damaged. The emperor also still seemed to harbor hopes of recovering the situation by a military victory. And if such a victory were possible, he had to be there to take direct credit for it.

At the same time, the Liao prepared to invade the Song. The Liao emperor sacrificed to the gods of war on 11 November, and ordered the invasion of the Song on 21 November. Two days later, the Liao emperor arrived in Yanzhou. On 27 November, he went through the ritual of firing "ghost arrows," carried out before major military undertakings. The Liao emperor then went to Gu'an and, on 30 November, sacrificed to heaven and earth.[30] This was now more than a reaction to Song incursions; it signified a major shift in Liao policy toward the Song. For decades, the Liao had confined their military activities to supporting the Northern Han and defending their own territory from the Zhou and Song. In late 980, they reversed this practice and went over to the offensive. It would take twenty-five years to eventually settle a peace between the two empires. Thus, although Song Taizong could not know it at the time, his actions in 979 began an otherwise unnecessary war of attrition, which would cost both sides tens of thousands of lives and leave the border basically unchanged. It was a war that would dog Taizong to the end of his reign, and prejudice all of his military actions, and many of his political, in favor of more violent means.

The Liao campaign was focused on Guannan. There are no extant records of the Liao court's reasoning for this, but there are a few

possibilities. From the military perspective, as their later campaigns would show, the Guannan region was the most accessible part of Song territory. It was their preferred route of invasion even as their ability to capture cities or inflict damage decreased over time. The former Northern Han territory was difficult to attack now that the Song held the passes, difficult to operate in given both the general poverty of the area and Song control of the urban centers, and it was distant from the Song capital. Essentially, the Song would not take such a peripheral attack very seriously. Guannan, on the other hand, held strategic passes and cities that blocked the Liao road to the Song heartland.

The diplomatic and political advantages of the Guannan region were more mixed. The Liao continued to maintain that the region was rightfully theirs, ceded to them by Shi Jingtang. Attacking the Guannan area thus kept open their claim and affirmed that they did not accept Song ownership. It was also possible that the Liao court believed they could obtain the Guannan region through military and political means without expanding the conflict or having to attempt to destroy the Song itself. Of course, the very strategic passes that made the region valuable to both sides limited any Song concessions since it would be hard for the Song to develop a more southerly defense line. The Liao had an easier time of establishing a more northerly defense line, as its repeated successful defenses of the Sixteen Prefectures demonstrated. It is possible that the Liao themselves felt strongly about their claim to the region, but such a claim cut both ways. If the Later Jin cession of the territory made it legitimate, and the Song received its sovereignty from the Later Zhou, who got it from the Later Han, who got it from the Later Jin, then it was within the Song's remit to decide the disposition of the territory. Raising the issue of the Guannan region therefore also raised the issue of the possession of the Sixteen Prefectures. The problem diplomatically for the Liao was to keep the Guannan region in play without legitimizing Song claims to the Sixteen Prefectures.

It seems unlikely that the Liao would have tried to argue that the

Song should give them the territory ceded to them by Shi Jingtang because to do so would bolster Song legitimacy. Song legitimacy was on some level based upon receiving the Mandate of Heaven from the preceding northern dynasties. The formalization of this understanding of the orthodox succession (*zhengtong*) would take place in the eleventh century, most obviously with Ouyang Xiu's designation of the northern regimes as dynasties.[31] Connecting Later Jin and Song legitimacy as the basis of their territorial claim to the Guannan region would have forced the Liao to concede that the Song had the Mandate of Heaven. Taken together then, the Liao were on far safer ground attempting to keep the conflict as purely military as possible.

The Liao army surrounded Waqiaoguan on 9 December, beating off a Song attack the next night, and an approaching Song force two days later. The same day, a Liao army reached Xiongzhou and occupied Longwan Dike. A Song force engaged them, taking heavy casualties, and then becoming lost in the suburbs during the night. It was able to break out of the Liao lines early in the morning and march to Mozhou, before regrouping to successfully attack the Liao as they were crossing their newly constructed bridge across the river. On 18 December, the Song army arrayed for battle on the south side of the river near Waqiao to block another Liao attempt to cross. Xiu Ge forded the river and defeated the Song force and pursued it to Mozhou, killing and wounding a great number. The Song army regrouped and returned the next day. The Liao attacked them again and virtually annihilated them.[32]

While the struggle for Guannan continued, Taizong announced that he would tour the northern border, leaving the capital on 22 December. The following day a report arrived from Guannan that a Liao force of more than ten thousand troops had been defeated, and more than three thousand men beheaded. The Liao army began to withdraw on 26 December, with the Liao emperor reaching Yanzhou on 4 January. Since the Liao had withdrawn, Taizong wanted to advance and attack Youzhou, still seeking the victory that would

continue to evade him for the rest of his reign. He relented, however, in the face of his advisors' opposition. They opposed the campaign on several grounds, not the least of which was that, once the Liao had retreated into the highly defensible terrain around Youzhou and Jizhou, an immense army would be required to dislodge them. Taizong then also withdrew from the border, though sporadic fighting continued.[33]

The situation as it stood in early 981 was a curious interlocking puzzle of political and military motivations, though the political considerations were probably the paramount drivers of events. Song Taizong needed to win a large offensive victory against the Liao to bolster his military credibility, and thus his political authority. In concrete terms, this meant that he had to capture and hold the Sixteen Prefectures. He therefore had to wage a war of annihilation, a campaign or campaigns aimed at destroying the Liao's military ability to resist his desired goal, the permanent occupation of the Sixteen Prefectures. Taizong's political situation placed increasing pressure on him to undertake this risky war, though he had recourse to various temporary expedients, like eliminating his nephews Dezhao and Defang, and his younger brother Tingmei, to relieve that pressure. The situation for the Liao was much different. Liao policy had consistently sought a peaceful trade relationship with the Song. But Song Taizong's personal involvement in the 979 invasion of the Sixteen Prefectures and subsequent humiliation foreclosed the possibility of returning to the status quo antebellum. The Liao leadership could not, therefore, achieve its primary policy goal as long as Taizong reigned. Taizong's belligerence confronted them with the continuing possibility of future large-scale invasions. They themselves evinced no reciprocal interest in invading the Song for the purpose of acquiring large tracts of territory or destroying the regime, though they did retain a claim on the Guannan region. Since they were blocked in their positive diplomatic goal, and left with only a defensive, negative military goal, they reasonably shifted to a war of attrition. The defensible terrain of

the Sixteen Prefectures lent itself well to this policy. In practice, this meant not only passively defending against Song incursions, but also actively raiding Song territory. This active defense posture allowed the Liao tentatively to hold the military initiative, though Song border forces aggressively contested this.

Taizong's need for a war of annihilation was also a sign of how much he continued Taizu's initial policies, despite the fact that Taizu himself had been moving away from such practices. The conquest of the individual kingdoms of southern and western China was a series of wars of annihilation. But Taizu had understood that he could not wage a war of annihilation with the Liao because their empire was too large and powerful, with too dispersed and difficult a geography, to deal it a decisive defeat. Even an overwhelming victory that would allow occupation of the Sixteen Prefectures region would likely trigger a massive counter-attack all along the border. Though Taizu had probably not formulated a solution to the "problem" of Liao control of the Sixteen Prefectures, he at least recognized the difficulties of the situation. Perhaps the best solution, despite the protestations of several historians that he never forgot the Sixteen Prefectures, was simply to downplay the importance of the territory.[34] A peaceful political relationship with the Liao would greatly diminish the military importance of the Sixteen Prefectures, leaving only the internal political issue of the "failure" to "recover" the territory. Taizong's military actions had now made the Sixteen Prefectures an unavoidable political issue, and foreclosed the possibility of a fully dignified peace for the Song that left the land in the hands of the Liao.

Taizu's strategic program was, as I have stressed in the preceding chapters, extremely flexible and opportunistic. The Sixteen Prefectures was the only piece of territory not co-terminous with the sovereign authority of a government. Taizu failed to capture the Northern Han twice, which was the obvious precursor to an attempt on the Sixteen Prefectures. Taizong's major mistake was moving directly from the capture of Taiyuan to attacking the Sixteen Prefectures. Taizu

consolidated his gains after every successful campaign before moving to the next target. Had he lived longer, it is certain he would have attacked the Northern Han again, but it is less certain that he would have necessarily gone on to attack the Sixteen Prefectures. On one occasion, Taizu gave Cao Han's proposal for the capture of Youzhou to Zhao Pu for consideration. While acknowledging its merits if carried out by Cao Han, he also pointed out that only Cao Han could maintain the position.[35]

Song Minqiu's (1019–1079) anecdote concerning Cao Han's plan for conquering Youzhou highlights the historiographical biases confronting any attempt to understand Taizu's plans. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the putative "south-first" strategy was itself an attempt to impose a plan onto more contingent events in order to create the appearance of a directed process. That plan also contributed to the idea that the Song conquest of China was a re-conquest and a reconstruction of the Tang empire, and therefore the legitimate recovery of the separate lost parts of that empire. Taizu's success in carrying out the early parts of the plan created the impression that he would inevitably have finished the plan had he not died prematurely. Taizong failed where Taizu would have succeeded because he was not as capable as his older brother. While there was no actual plan, and Taizu would eventually have confronted the question of the Sixteen Prefectures, our sources then fall prey to post hoc constructions of what the Song conquest should have been.

Taizong returned to the capital on 24 January. A Liao force of more than ten thousand men was defeated near Jiaozhou on 30 January. When Taizong returned to the capital, many officials urged him to capture Youzhou and Jizhou. This represented not so much the general attitude of officialdom toward the Sixteen Prefectures, as the awareness of many officials that Taizong wanted to launch such a campaign. Nevertheless, Zhang Jixian opposed the campaign on several undeniable grounds. He pointed out that the recently taken territory of the Northern Han was only newly pacified; transport into

Youzhou and Yanzhou was very difficult; several prefectures were as yet without forts; and that even the Liao were not well supplied in the area. Generalizing from these concrete points, he then quoted Sunzi that: “Winning a hundred times in a hundred battles is not as good as winning without fighting.” Zhang then advised heightening the walls and deepening the moats, in other words, a passive defense. He concluded by pointing out that choosing good soldiers was not as important as choosing good generals. This was, perhaps, meant to soften his opposition, by implying that the fault for any previous failure was due to the generals chosen, not to Taizong’s own participation. On the other hand, it might also have been a veiled criticism of the emperor, emphasizing that the previous failures were failures of leadership and were not the fault of the troops. Zhang’s more general message was a warning against the emperor concentrating his efforts on military affairs, rather than on ruling well and improving the lives of the people. Taizong backed off in the face of Zhang’s opposition since he had made two points quite effectively, first, the military situation was not favorable, and, second, the political situation was not secure.[36]

Liao raids continued, though with very little success, as the Song army was proving to be much more formidable on the defensive than it had been on the offensive. Indeed, this would characterize much of the Song–Liao military relationship – either clashes of a strong Liao offense with a strong Song defense, or a weak Song offense meeting a weak Liao defense. In response to the Liao incursions, the Song army began to strengthen both its logistical system and its fortifications along the border. From the border of Qingyuan, they opened the Xu and Jiju Rivers for fifty li to join the Bai River, thus improving transport into Guannan. Zhou Shizong, it will be remembered, had similarly re-opened the water transport system as he advanced into the region on his Sixteen Prefectures campaign. A hundred miles northwest of Sanjiao, in a place called Gujun, Pan Mei drove the Liao out of their outposts into the valleys and ravines there, which they

used as bases for raiding.[37]

While the border was firming up militarily, Taizong was taking similar political steps in the capital. His nephew Defang died suddenly on 18 April, at the age of twenty-three, without notice of an illness or other cause preceding his death.[38] This convenient death removed the last of Taizu's sons, and it seems safe to assume that Taizong ordered it. Defang's death was something of a double-edged sword, however, as the security it yielded to Taizong's political position came at the cost of confirming for anyone who suspected it, that the emperor was also responsible for Dezhao, and possibly even Taizu's, death as well. We can never know for certain which deaths he was directly responsible for, or if he was just extremely lucky in the timing of his family members' deaths, but their felicitous occurrences at his times of greatest political need argue that he must have been involved in some of them.

The signs from the heavens were also not very favorable, since it had not rained from spring to summer. Liao raids began again in early June, though their first two raids of seven and then ten thousand men strong were both defeated with heavy casualties. These were Song successes, though negative ones, inasmuch as they denied the Liao advantages rather than providing the Song advantages. Taizong was interested in going over to the offense, but his attempts to enlist the aid of other steppe states in a campaign against the Liao were proving fruitless.[39]

A quite different political problem was becoming clear with respect to the bureaucracy itself. Lu Duosun had become increasingly powerful and autocratic, acting much as Zhao Pu had but without the kind of close connections to the imperial family that had protected Zhao for so long. Lu had taken control of the flow of information from the government to the emperor, which may explain some of Taizong's difficulties in accurately gauging the mood of the army and bureaucracy. This became acutely obvious on 9 October when Tian Xi managed to submit a lengthy memorial directly to Taizong on the eve

of his departure to take up his post as Assistant Fiscal Intendant of Hebei. Since Hebei was on the front line with the Liao, his concerns were extremely relevant. The first thing he brought up was that the army had not been rewarded for conquering the Northern Han. This was a critical matter of military management given the ongoing confrontation. The remaining four issues were related to the proper functions of government, such as the admonition to select talented men and then trust them to carry out their duties.[40] While much of Tian's memorial was extremely conventional, it nonetheless, if his concern about rewarding the troops is any measure, addressed serious problems within the government and army. That Taizong actually responded to the memorial indicates the seriousness with which he received Tian's criticisms. Tian continued his admonitions after reaching his post, which must have accentuated the lack of other dissenting opinions reaching the emperor. His underlying political point struck home and was swiftly acted upon, though the specific issues he raised were apparently ignored.

Although Tian's memorials precipitated a fundamental restructuring of the political architecture at Taizong's court, the complex confluence of interests and conditions that fueled the changes had been developing for several years. We have already discussed the emperor's political weakness and poor relations with the army. His likely assassinations of his nephews temporarily shored up his position on the throne, but damaged relations with his family members, most of who were married into military families. Without external sources of legitimacy after his failures in the field, Taizong was desperate for the political support of some segment of the Song dynastic establishment. This was particularly critical as his younger brother Tingmei was rapidly becoming an attractive candidate to replace him. With Taizu's sons both dead, and the principle of older brother to younger brother succession "established," Tingmei was an obvious replacement for the unpopular Taizong. Lu Duosun, by comparison, while not nearly as much of a concern for the emperor as his younger

brother, was nonetheless an annoying problem with little or no redeeming value. Once Zhao Pu had been pushed out with Lu's help, Lu was no longer of critical importance to the emperor.

Lu Duosun badly overplayed his hand and created the conditions necessary for a political deal that would rescue Taizong's position. Zhao Pu had repeatedly sent requests to the court over the years, but, due to Lu's badmouthing him, nothing had come of those requests. Tian Xi's memorials shortly preceded the marriage of Zhao's son Chengzong, who was prefect of Zezhou, to the daughter of Taizu and Taizong's younger sister and Gao Huaide, one of Taizu's old comrades and an attendee of the drinking party at which Taizu had "dissolved military power over a cup of wine." The wedding took place in the capital, and Lu vindictively had Chengzong recalled to his post after less than a month. This not only infuriated Zhao Pu, but probably quite a few members of the imperial family as well. Taizong took advantage of some reports he had received that Tingmei was arrogant and unrestrained, and was secretly plotting to usurp authority, to summon Zhao Pu to court. This was the first open step in negotiating a political deal between Taizong and Zhao Pu.[41]

Taizong's problem up until that point had been that most of the politically powerful men and women of the dynasty supported the dynasty in general, but not him as emperor in particular. Zhao responded to Taizong's queries about Tingmei's character flaws by asserting his own loyalty to the dynasty, highlighting the problem of sycophants (i.e., Lu Duosun) slandering him, and providing an account of Taizong's mother getting Taizu to promise to pass the throne to Taizong. This event was supposed to have taken place at the beginning of the dynasty, when their mother was still alive, and entrusted Zhao to write down the promise and keep in a golden casket or strongbox. Zhao now offered this story and the record of Taizu's promise that he had kept safe. The "golden casket pledge" presents some knotty historiographical problems, only a few of which can actually be solved. Before turning to discuss them, however, we must

first clarify the political meaning of this document. In producing this document when he did, Zhao Pu made it clear that he was now personally supporting Taizong as emperor. This acted as a pledge to Taizong, and as a public statement to the other power-holders of the dynasty. But it was only the outward manifestation of a deal which had already been made. Subsequent events demonstrate that Taizong and Zhao agreed to destroy Lu Duosun and Tingmei to improve both of their positions and stabilize the regime. Lu's destruction was Zhao's personal payoff for his public support of Taizong. Tingmei's destruction helped Taizong, but it also removed a source of immense political instability within the dynasty, something that Zhao would also have valued.

It is impossible to determine whether Zhao manufactured the pledge in 981 or held onto the document since 961 for possible later use. Taizong certainly did not believe during Taizu's reign that Zhao would have supported his succession. In all likelihood, Zhao manufactured the story and the document in 981, since there is no mention of any mark of Taizu's hand on it. Why, if this were such a solemn pledge, did Taizu not write it himself, place his seal upon it or even sign it? It is possible that the story and pledge were true, but that Taizu did not place much importance on it. He would hardly have allowed something done to placate his mother interfere with his political plans. There is no way to resolve this, however, and we must simply accept both the story and the pledge as part of the political deal struck between Zhao and Taizong in 981.

Having received the document submitted by Zhao Pu, together with the contents of the Golden Casket, Taizong ordered Chengzong to remain in the capital, and brought Zhao back into government as a Grand Councilor on 17 October. The same day, Shi Xizai was appointed Director of the Bureau of Military Affairs, the first time someone with purely literary credentials would hold that post. The following day, Tingmei was asked to line up beneath Zhao Pu in court.[42] Taizong had profoundly altered the political order at his

court, and gone some way towards shoring up his own position with respect to the rest of the imperial clan and its affinal kin. Protecting Chengzong against Lu Duosun asserted the importance and privilege of the emperor's kin over the authority of the government. As a member of that class of imperial aristocrats, Zhao Pu's insertion at the top of the government structure reinforced Taizong's demonstration of its privileges and status. This must also have gone some way towards diminishing Tingmei's former position as the favorite champion of the disaffected power-holders looking for an appropriately Song alternative to Taizong. In that light, Shi Xizai's appointment to Director of the Bureau of Military Affairs may have reflected Taizong's discomfort with Cao Bin's presence in that position given that Cao's second son was married to Tingmei's daughter.

Amid continuing reports of Tingmei plotting to overthrow him, Taizong transferred his younger brother from Governor of Kaifeng to Regent of the western capital (Luoyang) on 7 April 982. As if to confirm the emperor's suspicions, Cao Bin hosted Tingmei on 26 April before he departed for his new post. Zhao Pu began his attack on Lu Duosun on 30 April, taking advantage of Tingmei's disfavor to destroy his nemesis. Zhao brought it to Taizong's attention that Lu had long been in contact with Tingmei. Lu's secret contacts were found to be treasonous, and on 10 May, the matter was sent to the high officials of the court for consideration. Severe punishment was recommended, and the following day, Lu was sacked and exiled to Guizhou with his family, Tingmei was returned to his private residence, and six other officials involved were publicly beheaded.[43] Notwithstanding the truth of the charges, which is impossible to determine, Zhao Pu's return to power presaged a political purge. Tingmei and Lu Duosun were ruined by the charges, but their ranks at least initially protected them from the severe punishment meted out to their subordinates. Now no longer a threat, Lu could be allowed to die in exile in 985. Tingmei's fate was of much greater moment for Taizong and the dynasty, and the emperor could not afford the luxury of his younger

brother continuing to live.

Tingmei's children were demoted to imperial nieces and nephews on 13 May, with their spouses suffering a concomitant demotion in rank. This created a clear difference between Taizu and Taizong's respective branches of the imperial line on the one hand, and that of Tingmei's on the other.[44] Taizong was extremely sensitive to any indication that officials saw his political actions as a witch-hunt, rather than a rightful ferreting out of rebellion. When the emperor summoned Liu Xi, in charge of the Bursary, on 21 May to punish him for having lent Tingmei several thousand *hu* of grain without authorization, Liu bowed his head and said that it was a capital offense. Liu's response highlighted the unwarranted severity of the search for Tingmei's putative adherents within the government, and angered Taizong. The emperor ordered him seized and beaten several dozen times. Two days later, two brothers of one of the six executed officials were ordered confined on Shanmen Island. On 27 May, two more officials who had previously served under Tingmei were sent out to provincial posts.[45] Even so, the political theatre was not yet done. On 19 June, on Zhao Pu's suggestion, Tingmei was demoted to Duke of Fuling County and sent out to Fangzhou under the watchful eyes of two trusted officials.[46] He would die shortly after reaching Fangzhou on 20 February 984, two years after the accusations of treason.[47] Taizong enfeoffed his own eldest son, Dechong, as King of Wei, and his second son, Deming, as King of Guangping Commandery, to firm up the imperial succession on 27 July.[48] While Taizong had turned his attention to political matters, the Liao had continued to raid across the border. The border remained unstable, but neither launched any large invasions during the second half of 982.

Liao emperor Jingzong died on 13 October 982 at the age of thirty-four. His eldest son, then twelve years old, posthumously known as Shengzong, succeeded him.[49] Empress Xiao became Dowager Empress and the empire's name was changed from Great Liao to Great Kitan (for simplicity's sake, I will continue to refer to the empire as

the Liao).[50] If anything, the succession had increased the likelihood of war by placing the bellicose Dowager Empress Xiao, aided by the great official Han Derang, in real control of the Liao court. Shengzong, or at least the Dowager Empress, was respectful enough of the previous emperor to wait for the new year to change the reign title, but the change in the empire's name hinted at some sort of a Kitan nativist revival. Whatever the nature of that change, however, there was no noticeable shift in Liao policy with regard to the Song.

Taizong continued his own policy of political retrenchment, taking advantage of charges against Cao Bin to remove him from the Bureau of Military Affairs.[51] The emperor heard rumors that soldiers on the border believed the extra monthly money bestowed upon them came from Cao Bin, not Taizong. Others believed that Cao was possibly plotting rebellion. Whether these rumors were true, or merely manufactured as an excuse to remove Cao, the result was the same. Cao's close ties to Tingmei made his position in the Bureau of Military Affairs impossible for the emperor. Of course, Taizong would soon bring Cao back to lead another campaign against the Liao (Chapter 9).

Liao raiding continued in 983, with another attack on Fengzhou on 1 May by more than ten thousand Liao cavalry defeated. By June, the downfall of one of the officials who had informed the emperor of Cao Bin's possible treasonous intentions convinced Taizong to exonerate Cao, though he was not returned the Bureau of Military Affairs. Cao's dismissal and rehabilitation was apparently still not enough to reassure the emperor that the social foundation of the imperial clan was firmly behind him, so on 23 November 983, he changed the given names of all of his sons and moved them to the Eastern Palace.[52] This was a decisive break with the previously corporate nature of the imperial clan, separating and elevating Taizong's own line over either of his brothers.' There was now only one truly imperial line with respect to succession, which the emperor had clearly expressed through his actions. At the same time that he was strengthening his position within the imperial family, Taizong

continued to improve his control over the army. By December of 983, he felt strong enough in that regard to discuss specific strategies for a campaign into the Sixteen Prefectures. In his discussion, he explicitly stated that the current border generals were all his appointees.[53] Clearly, the loyalty of the border generals had previously been of great concern to the emperor. Just as Taizu before him, Taizong had to alternate political consolidation with military adventure. The great difference between them, of course, was that Taizu followed military success with political advance, and Taizong followed military failure with political retrenchment. Taizong's institutional modifications, which grew out of his military failure-induced political weakness, colored the rest of the Song dynasty.

Large-scale military action against the Liao was still a few years off, however, and Taizong's discussion of the topic in late 983 was mostly a demonstration of his continued concern with the issue. He seems to have sent out an informal peace feeler to the Liao in December of 982, which was rejected. At about the same time, the Liao became aware that the Song army was constructing fortifications north of the Yellow River, and sent an expedition to disrupt it.[54] It is unclear whether these tentative steps toward an at least temporarily defensive posture by Taizong in late 982 and early 983 were a product of either his political or military weakness, or both. Given the political progress he had made during the year, and the fact that no military action was actually taken, however, the emperor's discussion of a campaign against the Liao was probably a sign that he perceived himself to be politically stronger but still militarily weak. Indeed, it seems that in 984, Taizong may have seriously contemplated setting aside military action in favor of external peace and internal consolidation. In practice, this meant increasing his legitimacy, and thus political power, by emphasizing that the empire was peaceful and economically healthy. The ultimate expression of this peace and bounty was to have been performance of the Feng and Shan sacrifices, which he was forced to call off on 24 July when a main hall in the

palace was destroyed by fire, possibly after being struck by lightning. The destruction of the hall, Taizong noted, was a sign that they were not according with Heaven's will.[55] Fortunately for the emperor, the Liao were otherwise occupied during his ill-omened attempt to invoke ceremonial legitimacy.

The only cloud on the border was a fairly minor disturbance by a man named Li Jiqian. Li was the younger brother of Li Jipeng, the leader of the Tangut or Western Xia (Xi Xia) people in the northwest, who had formally submitted to Song authority. In October of 984, when Jipeng had come to court, Jiqian had remained in Yinzhou and turned his hand toward raising a revolt. The seventeen-year-old's start was not promising, as Song troops quickly attacked him at his camp and beheaded five hundred of his men, burned more than four hundred tents, captured his mother and wife, and took more than ten thousand sheep, horses, and pieces of gear. Jiqian himself only barely escaped, but in the years to come, he would prove to be a major problem.[56]

[1] Qing Gaozong, *Yuzhi Shi Si Ji* (*Siku Quanshu*), 11.23ab (432), cited and translated in Johannes L. Kurz, "The Politics of Collecting Knowledge: Song Taizong's Compilations Project," T'oung Pao, 87, 4/5 (2001), 312. My translation here is slightly modified.

[2] SS 4.53.

[3] Liu Jingzhen, *Beisong Qianqi*, p. 46.

[4] SS 4.54.

[5] SS 4.54.

[6] LS 8.96. The *Liaoshi* states that Taizong: "Set himself up."

[7] SS 4.58.

[8] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 215–23.

[9] LS 9.101.

[10] XCB 20.442–3.

[11] XCB 20.443–7.

[12] XCB 20.447–52.

[13] XCB 20.453; SHY:B 7/8a.

[14] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 223–6.

[15] XCB 20.453–4.

[16] XCB 20.454–7.

[17] LS 9.102.

[18] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 226–30.

[19] XCB 20.457.

[20] XCB 20.460.

[21] SHY:B 7/9a; XCB 20.454.The exception was Cui Han, whose enthusiastic support, and the emperor’s delighted response resembled Zhou Shizong’s decision to go to Gaoping.

[22] XCB 20.460.

[23] LS 9.102. I translate it as “flat” rather than “back” since it refers to a *jian*, which is a straight, double-edged sword, rather than a *dao*, which is a curved, single-edged sword that would have a back.

[24] XCB 20.462–3.

[25] LS 9.102.

[26] There is a considerable discrepancy between the SHY and XCB numbers. The report from Guannan in SHY:B 7/9b-7/10a reports that more than ten thousand Kitan attacked and more than three thousand were beheaded. XCB 20.464 reports that several tens of thousands of Kitan attacked and more than ten thousand were beheaded. I have adopted SHY’s account and its more modest numbers.

[27] XCB 20.464.

[28] XCB 21.473.

[29] Peter Lorge, “War and the Creation,” pp. 231–34.

[30] LS 9.103.

[31] Johannes L. Kurz, “The Five Dynasties and Ten States in Song Times,” Journal of Song-Yuan Studies, 33 (2003), 190–1.

[32] LS 9.104.

[33] XCB 21.480–3.

[34] Wang Minxin, following Jiang Fucong, argued that Taizu never forgot his longstanding desire to recover the Northern Han (and the Sixteen Prefectures) and refused to consider China reunified without recovering it. This is impossible to prove based upon our currently available sources. Most previous scholarship accepts that Taizu had a plan, usually the "south-first" plan discussed, and discarded, in Chapter 5 that required him to conquer certain territories in a general order. The recovery of the Sixteen Prefectures and the subsequent Chanyuan Covenant was and remain extremely emotionally charged issues in China and Taiwan. It is likely that Taizu always wanted to capture the Sixteen Prefectures, but the strategic circumstances he faced changed constantly during his reign, and he adapted accordingly. Taizu's feelings are simply beyond our reach. See Wang Minxin, "Liao-Song Chanyuan Mengyue Dijie di Beijing," pt.1, Zhongguo Shumu Jikan, 9/2, 1975, 35–48; pt. 2, *Zhongguo Shumu Jikan*, 9/3, 1975, 45–56; pt. 3, *Zhongguo Shumu Jikan*, 9/2, 1975, 53–64, particularly pt. 1, 42.

[35] Song Minqiu *Qunming Tuichao Lu*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980, 1.13.

[36] XCB 21.483–5.

[37] XCB 22.488–9.

[38] XCB 22.490.

[39] XCB 22.492–3.

[40] XCB 22.495–7.

[41] The precise order of events is problematic, see Peter Lorge, "Sima Guang on Song Taizong," pp. 25–8.

[42] XCB 22.500–2.

[43] XCB 23.514–7.

[44] XCB 23.518; Liu Jingzhen, *Song Huangdi he Tamen de Quanli*, p. 78.

[45] XCB 23.518–9.

[46] XCB 23.520.

[47] XCB 25.572. While lamenting his death, Taizong mentioned that Tingmei had been the child of Taizong's wet-nurse. Li Tao accepted Taizong's assertion [XCB 24.537] but there is no other evidence to support it.

[48] XCB 23.523.

[49] LS 10.107.

[50] XCB 23.533.

[51] XCB 24.537.

[52] XCB 24.555; Liu Jingzhen, *Huangdi he Tamen de Quanli*, p.78.

[53] XCB 24.557.

[54] LS 10.108.

[55] XCB 25.581.

[56] XCB 25.586.

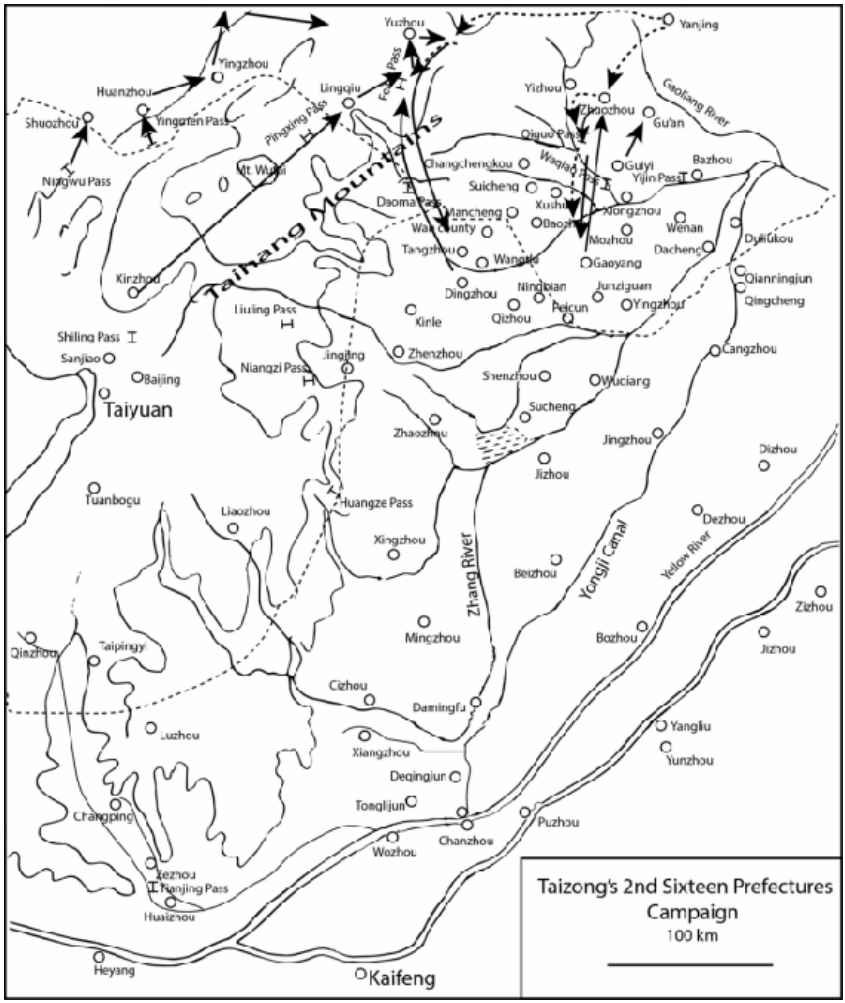
9

Failure and rebellion

The Song–Liao border remained peaceful throughout 985, though it was a peace due to inaction on both sides rather than a positive peace established by mutual agreement. Nothing had in fact been settled between the two courts, which left open the very real possibility of future conflict. Neither side had any reason to believe that the other side would keep the peace, particularly since neither side found the situation acceptable. Taizong continued to build his political power by the simple act of being emperor in a stable and peaceful environment. The only hiccup in this calm period was the madness of his eldest son and, until then, presumed heir-apparent, in September of that year.[1] Taizong nevertheless felt politically strong enough in 986, after several years of stable ruling, to attempt another military adventure against the Liao. Once again, it would be Taizong who broke the peace with the Liao and invaded their territory. And just as happened the first time, Taizong's attempt at military glory would fail miserably and instigate years of Liao retaliatory raids.

Taizong's second Sixteen Prefectures campaign (20 February 986–18 June 986)[2]

Taizong returned to the problem of the Sixteen Prefectures in February of 986. After some encouragement, he resolved, once again, to conquer the territory. His plan called for the main army to slowly approach Youzhou (the Liao southern capital, modern Beijing), while smaller forces raided farther west, drawing the Liao into fighting in mountainous terrain, unfavorable for cavalry. Ideally, the Liao would overreact to the initial incursions and exhaust their army trying to defend their territory. Once the Liao army was worn down, the main Song army would advance to Youzhou, crushing any opposition. The plan relied upon the Liao strenuously defending their territory from the earliest stages of the invasion but, unfortunately for the Song, that sort of defense was much more typical of their thinking than the Liao leaders'. More practically, it would take the Liao some time to mobilize after the Song army invaded. Intentionally or otherwise then, the Liao kept most of their forces out of the fray until the Song army overextended itself and began to fall back. They then attacked, annihilating a large part of the main Song army.



21. Song Taizong's second Sixteen Prefectures campaign

Many Song officials felt in early 986 that it was an opportune time to invade Liao territory and seize the Sixteen Prefectures. In their memorials to Taizong they claimed that the Liao had broken the treaty when they tried to intercede in the Song invasion of the Northern Han.[3] More importantly for the present situation, the Liao ruler was young and his mother controlled his affairs, with the military affairs being run by General Han Derang, who everyone hated.[4] We cannot read these memorials as entirely spontaneous and idealistic expressions of the feelings of the officials. While it is true that many officials truly believed that the Song should conquer the Sixteen

Prefectures, many others would have responded to the emperor's clear interest in large-scale military action. In sharp contrast to Taizu's campaigns, there were no recorded objections to the invasion. Zhao Pu would later criticize Taizong for surrounding himself with yes-men. And it is also worth noting that no military men were consulted, as the emperor had done before invading the Northern Han in 979.

Although the first time Taizong had taken the field it ended in personal humiliation, he could not afford to be perceived as being afraid to fight. Accordingly, the emperor planned to join the campaign soon after it achieved its initial objectives. It is difficult, however, to reconcile the debate at court with Taizong's instructions to Cao Bin, the supreme field commander. The complete breakdown of the campaign has also obscured the intended strategy. The emperor's plan appears to have been to attack Yun and Ying prefectures in the west, while the main army threatened Youzhou. Caught between threats in the east and west, the Liao army would have to send substantial forces to defend Youzhou, the most important city in the area, leaving the area west of the mountains vulnerable. At least according to Taizong's later defense of the campaign to Zhao Pu, he expected first to capture the western region before attacking Youzhou. Presumably, Taizong originally expected personally to take command of the main army once the conditions for a successful siege of Youzhou were in place, just as he had in the conquest of Taiyuan.

The relative merits of the plan are hard to debate in the abstract, but in practice, it turned out to be a disaster. Although the Song army fought well on several occasions, the tempo of the campaign never came close to what the emperor had envisioned. The Song army initially advanced much faster, and against weaker resistance, than expected. It seems that the invasion took the Liao court by surprise, forcing a desperate scramble to mobilize defense forces. This completely undermined Taizong's plan, since it anticipated, indeed relied upon, not achieving tactical surprise in order to achieve strategic surprise later on. Quite perversely then, the early success of

the Song army destroyed the campaign strategy and left it overextended and vulnerable. Neither Taizong nor his field commanders knew what to do in the absence of the main Liao army. By the time the Liao army did arrive, the Song army was no longer ready to fight.

Taizong brought Cao Bin out of retirement to lead the invasion. Why he chose Cao is unclear, though perhaps since none of the generals had been consulted on the campaign, it was important to place the most prominent military man in the empire in charge of carrying out the emperor's extremely rigid instructions. Cao was appointed Commander in Chief on 4 March. On Cao's left flank, an army under Tian Zhongjin would enter Liao territory via Feihu, and an army under Pan Mei would invade through Yanmen west of Tian Zhongjin's column. Taizong's initial edict announcing the campaign and the appointments clearly indicated that he would personally take the field. The invasion was, after all, just as much about recovering, or really establishing, the emperor's personal military and political credibility, as it was about territory.

The first battle of the campaign took place on 16 April, when Tian Zhongjin defeated a Liao force south of Gu'an, and then captured the town. Four days later, Tian defeated a Liao force north of Feihu, and Pan Mei, advancing through Xixing, chased some Liao troops north to Huanzhou, taking five hundred heads in the initial clash and an additional five hundred heads during the pursuit. The prefect of Huanzhou surrendered his city to Pan on 23 April, and Shuozhou surrendered the following day. Cao Bin's forward units overran Zhuozhou the same day, having previously (23 April) driven off a Liao army east of the city. After clearing the field of the Liao covering force, they then stormed the north gate of Zhuozhou. With that foothold established, the city fell to Cao the following day.[5] How and why the Song were able to capture these cities so quickly is not apparent in the sources, though it does seem that a fair number of strongpoints surrendered shortly after the Song army arrived.

The Liao emperor was informed of the Song invasion on 17 April, by which time, the Song army occupied the territory, but not the cities, of Qigou, Zhuozhou, Gu'an, and Xincheng. The Liao emperor mobilized his forces, immediately dispatching Yelü Xiuge to the front and putting Yelü Weizhi in charge of leading the main army south.[6] Only two months before, the Liao army had returned from a successful campaign against the Jurchen, and morale must have been high. The Liao political position was similarly strong with regard to the Song, since the Liao court had just accepted the submission of the Tangut leader Li Jiqian, who had so recently rebelled against the Song.[7] Contrary to the Song emperor's expectations, the Liao army immediately attacked the Song army in the east, defeating a Song force at Gu'an on 19 April and capturing the Song commander. Although the Song army still had the advantage, the Liao army's aggressive reaction was already unraveling Taizong's carefully conceived plan.

To the east, Cao Bin had just personally reached Zhuozhou. A force of light Song cavalry that Cao had sent across the Zhuo River to scout out the Liao positions was attacked on 28 April. It counter-attacked, and defeated the Liao troops south of the city, beheading a thousand men, and capturing five hundred horses. The aggressive Liao reaction to Cao's presence in the east, however, did not bode well for the campaign as a whole. Cao's position was not strong, and Liao attacks were preventing him from consolidating his position. About two weeks later, on 15 May, Mi Xin defeated a Liao force at Xincheng, beheading three hundred men. The Liao regrouped and forced Mi to retreat a short distance, before cutting off and surrounding him with his three hundred personal guards. The incessant shower of arrows killed most of Mi's men, but he was able to hold the Liao off until dusk, personally shooting down several of the enemy. As dusk fell, he took up a large sword and broke out with his remaining cavalrymen, now slightly more than a hundred strong. They had killed several dozen Liao troops, when a Song rescue force arrived, sent by Cao Bin.

This combined Song force turned and attacked the Liao, defeating them northeast of Xincheng, beheading a thousand men and capturing a hundred horses.[8] Despite this hard-won victory, however, the eastern prong of the Song invasion had been blunted.

Pan Mei was faring considerably better in the west. He attacked Yingzhou on 30 April, and its governor surrendered the city to him. He captured Yunzhou two weeks later, on 14 May. Feihu surrendered to Tian Zhongjin on 4 May, followed by Lingqiu on 9 May, and Weizhou on 28 May. These peripheral strikes had little effect on the campaign as a whole.

The Liao concentrated their efforts on defeating the main army threatening Youzhou. Yelü Xiuge took up a forward position blocking Cao's line of advance and dug in behind a long rampart. At this point, the Liao and Song accounts of what followed differ somewhat. The Liao believed that Xiuge's army blocked Cao Bin and the main Song army from advancing further. The Song army challenged Xiuge to battle and camped opposite the Liao on a north–south line spread over two miles. On 27 May, the Liao emperor, then camped seventeen miles east of Zhuozhou, ordered Xiuge and the other generals to strictly guard the water routes in order to prevent Song soldiers from returning to Zhuozhou. The following day, Xiuge defeated the Song army, and recaptured Zhuozhou on 29 May. In the Song account, Cao's army ran out of provisions after more than ten days in Zhuozhou, and was forced to retreat to Xiongzhou to resupply.[9] Most likely, the Liao army interdicted the Song supply system by blocking the water routes. Cut off from supplies, Cao was forced to retreat.

Taizong's plan had called for a carefully paced advance, but the forward Liao positions, either intentionally or unintentionally, had fallen rapidly to the Song advance force. Pan Mei had captured Huan, Shu, Yun, and Ying prefectures, Tian Zhongjin had captured Feihu, Lingqiu, and Weizhou, and Cao Bin had captured Xincheng, Gu'an, and Zhuozhou. Taizong, however, had become increasingly worried with each report of a victory that Cao was advancing the army too

quickly and that the Liao could cut off his supply lines. When Cao fell back to Xiongzhou to resupply himself with provisions from the reserve troops, Taizong got very anxious and sent messengers to order him to halt where he was and not to advance again. Cao was to lead his troops along the Baigou River and join up with Mi Xin in order to raise morale and strengthen the disposition of forces in the west. Cao and Mi were then to wait for Pan Mei to complete the capture of the western region. Finally, they would link up with Tian Zhongjin and march east to Youzhou.[10]

It is not clear what Cao was supposed to have done in the original plan, beyond not march north too fast. He had had to reach a sizable city as soon after he crossed the border as possible in order to support and defend his army in the otherwise open terrain. The road to Zhuozhou was really the only possible route for the main army, and it appears that he used waterways to move his supplies and forces in some capacity. Had he advanced more slowly on this route, he would still have been vulnerable to the Liao interdicting his supplies, as well as being vulnerable to cavalry raids. A certain simple military logic thus impelled Cao to march to Zhuozhou, even in the absence of the Liao army. With the Liao army actually in the field, it was more important than ever to establish a firm bridgehead into Liao territory if the invasion was to succeed. Zhuozhou was still the only place that could fulfill that function. Yet, Taizong had issued further confusing orders that paralyzed the main army's operations. Cao could now neither advance nor retreat, nor could he fall back to regroup and resupply himself. He and the main army were now to wait in limbo while the western region was conquered.

Taizong's orders not only threw the army into chaos, they also undermined Cao Bin's authority. With the emperor issuing orders from the capital, a classic military mistake, though typical of Taizong's tendency to micro-manage, no objective, and reports that the Song forces in the west were racking up considerable successes, Cao's subordinates took matters into their own hands and marched off to

fight the Liao. Their objective was, not surprisingly, Zhuozhou, which they soon recaptured. But by now, Liao cavalry was ranging over the line of march, and the Song soldiers had to fight the entire way back. The Liao were overextended too, and in one instance resorted to a ruse, fooling Mi Xin despite wise advice that saw through it, which allowed them a two-day break to resupply their exhausted store of arrows from Youzhou.[11]

The summer heat was beginning to take its toll on the already exhausted Song troops, and when it was clear that there would be no resupply of provisions, they again began to fall back to the border. Cao was initially inclined to leave a garrison of ten thousand men in Zhuozhou but was warned against it. He relented and ordered the residents of the city to be taken south with the retreating Song army. The main army was now retreating in some disorder, pursued by the Liao.

With Zhuozhou abandoned and much of the Song army spread out along the Zhuozhou–Waqiaoguan road, the Liao, in a very elegant strategic move, shifted the full weight of their army to the Gu'an–Waqiaoguan road, to the east. The main Liao army reached Gu'an on 3 June and surrounded it the following day. Yelü Pode was the first to scale the wall and the city was retaken. The road to Waqiaoguan was now open to the Liao army, as they raced to cut off the Song army retreating from Zhuozhou. Cut off from Waqiaoguan, Cao decided to retreat toward Yizhou. The Liao army caught up with him at Qigouguan on 12 June, badly defeating the Song army, and chasing the shattered remnants to the Juma River. While Li Jixuan counter-attacked and drove off the Liao, chasing them to Hushan, Cao gathered his remaining troops and forded the Juma River at night, camping south of the Yi River.[12] Tens of thousands of soldiers had been killed or drowned.[13] With the Song army defeated, the main Liao army withdrew from the border on 15 June.[14]

Taizong received word of the main army's defeat on 18 June and ordered the generals to camp their units along the border. Cao Bin and

Mi Xin were summoned to attend court. Meanwhile, Tian Zhongjin led the expeditionary army to Dingzhou, and Pan Mei returned to Daizhou. As Pan was returning to Song territory with his troops and the civilians gathered from four prefectures, the Liao Dowager Empress attacked Huanzhou with a force of more than one hundred thousand men. Pan's subordinates argued over strategy and then failed to support each other when they clashed with the Liao, leading to the decimation of one unit and the capture of its commander. He starved himself to death in captivity.[15]

While these dramatic events were being played out on the border, and before Cao Bin and the others had arrived at court, Zhao Pu wrote a memorial to Taizong in which he criticized the invasion, describing it as "shooting a pearl at a sparrow" or "setting a trap for a rat." Zhao accepted that he might be severely punished for criticizing the invasion, especially because he was the only official speaking against it. He argued that trying to take territory from nomads was useless. The best policy was *wuwei* (inaction) and the Liao would have no choice but to come and accept Chinese culture.[16] Coming from one of the architects of the initial Song conquest, and a man who had never objected to Taizu's campaigns, this was no principled outburst of pacifism or even Daoist belief. Zhao was simply arguing, framed within the appropriate political language of his time, that military action at that time was unwise. It was considerably more acceptable to argue for the culturally sanctioned philosophical position of *wuwei* than bluntly to tell the emperor that he should not start wars he was not competent to win.

Taizong personally wrote a reply to Zhao in which he praised his loyalty in criticizing the invasion but explained that he had not intended to really invade and that his original plan had failed because Cao Bin and his subordinates had not followed his instructions. He had just wanted to cause the Liao to flee far into the desert. The problem was that Cao Bin's subordinates each pursued their own plans. The troops quickly advanced and then retreated, which wore

them out and used up their supplies. Thus, it was not his fault that the action failed.[17] The emperor's response bordered on the mendacious, since Cao had clearly either not been ordered to remain at Xiong and Ba prefectures, or his initial advance contrary to that order had been tacitly sanctioned. Taizong's predilection for micro-management argues for the former, as it is unlikely that Cao would have completely disregarded the emperor's explicit orders at the very beginning of the campaign. Certainly, Taizong would not have waited until late in the campaign to order Cao not to advance if he had believed that Cao was directly contravening his orders.

Taizong's second major military defeat further undermined his legitimacy, but his ruthless extermination of any family member who could have presented an alternative to his rule had considerably diminished the political consequences of that result. In some ways, this was a new development for Song emperors – the first time that a significant military failure was neither a threat to the emperor's position nor to the dynasty's survival. The emperor's political capital had been diminished, but that simply left him a weaker emperor. Like hereditary emperors in the future, his incompetence once enthroned might be a cause for regret without leading to his deposition. The dynasty as a political unit was stuck with Taizong no matter what his shortcomings. It is not surprising, though, given his weakened political circumstances, that he promoted Yuanxi, his eldest surviving son, to Governor of Kaifeng on 13 November 986, simultaneously bolstering his own claim to have legitimately succeeded his older brother and reassuring the government of the stability of the dynasty.[18] He was still reluctant officially to designate an heir-apparent, however, since this would have distracted loyalty away from himself.

If Taizong's political problems were less severe after his second campaign failed, his military problems were only just beginning. Nap-yin Lau has convincingly shown that, in contrast to many historians' belief that Taizong's two failed campaigns demonstrated

overwhelming Liao military superiority with respect to the Song, the Liao themselves felt quite threatened by the Song army. They did not regard either the Song empire or its army as weak. Consequently, the Liao court made the prevention of a third Song invasion their most important military task.[19] But diplomacy seemed out of the question given the Song emperor's demonstrated belligerence and his personal humiliation during the first campaign. Without the possibility of a political solution to the border problem, at least while Taizong reigned, their only option was a military one. Unfortunately, as they were probably well aware, this was a poor second choice. Their goal was to prevent a Song invasion, and, more generally, to establish a peaceful border with the Song empire. But short of destroying the Song regime entirely, something they were not capable of doing, only a political settlement could create a stable, long-term solution to the problem. Military action could only hope to accomplish two things, first, to prevent a third Song invasion by pre-emptive attacks and, second, to convince the Song court that a political solution was in their own interest as well.[20] Taizong's intransigence diminished the effect of the latter, leaving only the purely military aspect of the conflict.

In October of 986, Liao emperor Shengzong began preparations for a southern campaign against the Song.[21] On 7 January 987, Tian Zhongjin invaded Liao territory and overran Qigouguan, but three days later, the Liao annihilated a ten thousand strong Song force at Junziguan. The commander of Bozhou, alerted by the Liao victory at Junziguan, hastily completed the city's fortifications, gathered provisions and made all military preparations in anticipation of the Liao exploiting their victory to attack the city. The populace's resentment against his measures evaporated when a Liao army decided to bypass the city because it was so well prepared. A Liao force then raided Daizhou, arriving beneath the prefectural seat's walls. On 20 January, a Song army lured the Liao force into an ambush at Tudengbao, captured a son of the Liao Great Northern

King, and beheaded more than two thousand men.

Notwithstanding this minor victory, the situation on the border in early 987 was not going well for the Song. Repeated defeats had decimated the Song army, forcing border cities and towns to hastily draft civilians to defend their walls. Yizhou was actually overrun with great loss of life, and even those cities that held out had their surrounding areas devastated. The tens of thousands of troops killed proved extremely difficult to replace, and many officials were resistant to widespread drafting of the farm population. Taizong ultimately accepted the position that peace and military recovery were the best policy, but he continued to encourage civil officials who offered up plans for war, or at least adopted belligerent stances.[22] This marked a decisive shift of military initiative from the Song to the Liao.The Liao court had thus succeeded in its goal of preventing another Song invasion, but at the cost of maintaining a forward, aggressive military posture. These costs would continue to rise as Song defenses hardened, and its army recovered.

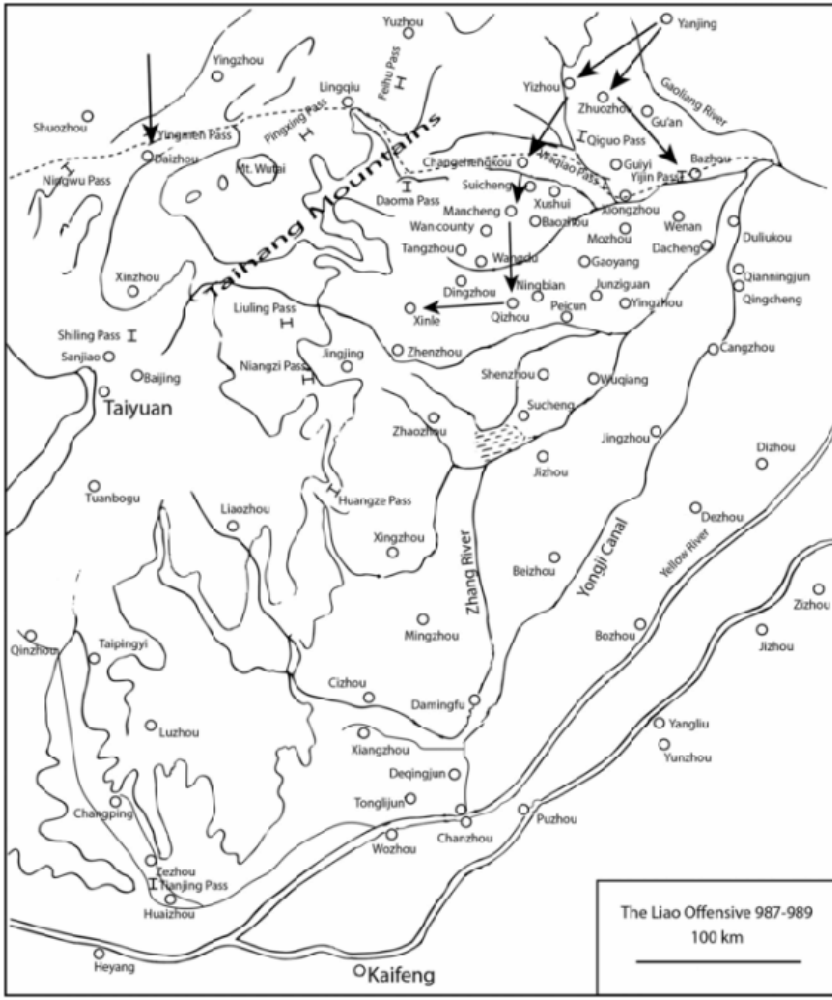
The Liao on the offense

The Liao began making preparations for another southern invasion in July of 988. Shengzong reached his southern capital, Youzhou, on 27 October, and then proceeded on to Zhuozhou. When he reached there on 8 November, he had an arrow with a message to surrender fired into the city. The inhabitants refused to surrender, and the city was carried by storm on 13 November. Shengzong's son-in-law was struck by an arrow in the attack and dispatched home in the imperial coach. A Song army on its way to relieve the city turned back, and was pursued and defeated as it retreated. Shaduiyi fell to a Liao force on 16 November16, and a Liao victory was reported at Langshan on 4 December. Five days later, a Song was force was defeated at Yijinguan, and another on 11 December as the Liao army approached Changchengkou.[23]

Shengzong overwhelmed Changchengkou on 18 December, killing or capturing the entire garrison. He surrounded Mancheng on 19 December, overrunning it three days later. On 26 December, the Liao conquered Qizhou, and plundered it. Xinle fell the following day, and Xiaolangshanzhai the day after. A thousand-man strong Song force-marching through Yijinguan was defeated and driven off on 4 January 989.[24] The only serious check the Liao experienced in their campaign was on 12 December, when a Song army crushed a Liao force at the Tang River, and pursued it all the way to the Cao River, beheading fifteen thousand Liao soldiers and capturing ten thousand horses in the process.[25]

The main Liao army began to withdraw on 9 February 989, though Shengzong decided to strike at Yizhou before ending the campaign. On 1 March, he attacked Yizhou, beating off a Song relief force from Suicheng. The following day, the city was carried by storm, and its captured soldiers sent back to Liao territory. Shengzong then quit the field, officially demobilizing his army on 9 March.[26] It had

been a successful campaign for the Liao emperor, but like any military action, it must have also cost him treasure and manpower. His son-in-law's injury early in the campaign was an example of the sort of risk and costs involved even, or particularly, given the need to lead from the front, for the Liao aristocracy. Captured Song soldiers were drafted into the Liao army several times during the campaign, perhaps another sign of the losses Shengzong had incurred. Coming on the heels of Taizong's invasion, the Liao campaign had also devastated much of the already ravaged border area. This was intentional, as it diminished the Song army's ability to campaign in the area, and created a buffer zone between the two sides. Both Shengzong's military and political points had been made, as he had recovered Song gains like Zhuozhou, and even advanced into Song territory.



22. Liao 987–989 raids

Shengzong's personal involvement in campaigning was temporarily over, but he continued to send troops to attack the Song. Perhaps just as alarming for the Song court, Shengzong strengthened his diplomatic ties to the rising Tangut leader Li Jiqian, even sending Li a princess, though not his own daughter, in marriage.[27] The possibility of an alliance between the Liao in the northeast with the Tanguts in the northwest was a serious threat to the Song. Yet the Song also remained a threat to the Liao, and on 6 June, Shengzong ordered his army to prepare against the Song. The next day, Yelü Xiuge led a force to Mancheng, where he took the surrender of more

than seven hundred people and sent them to the Liao court. A Song force was reported near the border and camped at Yizhou on 18 June, which no one on the Liao side wanted to confront.[28] The Liao remained alert, however, for opportunities to damage the Song army, and, when Weilujun was experiencing supply problems, sent an army tens of thousands of men strong to attack it. Yin Jilun led a combined cavalry and infantry force several thousand men strong to block their route. The Liao army chose to bypass Yin's force without attacking it, so Yin pursued it by forced-march and attacked it by surprise between the Tang and Xu Rivers. Caught unaware while eating, Yin killed an important Liao general, and completely shattered the Liao force.

This defeat, coupled with Shengzong's increasing preoccupation with other internal matters, ended the period of Liao response to Taizong's 986 invasion. In the coming years, both sides sent out peace feelers, the Liao in 991 and the Song in 994, which came to nothing. Neither side had the force at its disposal to destroy the other, even had they desired to do so, nor were political conditions internally and externally right for a satisfactory settlement. What is noteworthy here, in the light of many later interpretations that stressed Song weakness, is how balanced the Song and Liao military forces were in the late tenth century. Both empires had sharply limited military resources, and both found campaigning on their common border in northern Hebei extremely difficult. The topography constrained both defense and offense, making both courses difficult for both sides. But although their conflict remained unresolved in the last decade of the tenth century, their military stalemate allowed smaller internal matters to take precedence and absorb their attention. In the case of the Song, Taizong's military debacles would be followed by one of the worst rebellions in the dynasty's history.

The rebellion of Wang Xiaopo and Li Shun (23 March 993–2 April 995)[29]

The rebellion that struck Sichuan in 993 came at a bad time for Song Taizong. His second loss to the Liao in 986 had locked the two empires in a prolonged confrontation on the northern border that showed no signs of abating. By the 990s, the initiative had shifted to the Liao, where it would more or less remain until the Chanyuan Covenant in 1005 ended the hostilities. Taizong's disastrous leadership in both failed campaigns, his publicly expressed doubts about the military leadership, and his blaming of the military problems on the generals could not have improved the army's morale. Furthermore, an aggressive leader in the northwest, Li Jiqian, was asserting the independence of the Tanguts, and the empire had been suffering extensive droughts and flooding. Under these circumstances, it was imperative that the uprising be put down rapidly and decisively. Taizong sent his loyal retainer, the eunuch general Wang Jien, to take care of it. Despite Wang's ruthless brutality, and the elimination of a succession of rebel leaders, unrest continued until 995. Wang's leadership was also characteristic of a significant shift under Taizong toward placing eunuchs in important military posts, something that was almost unheard of under Taizu. Several other eunuch commanders also served with distinction in putting down the rebellion.

The immediate cause of the rebellion is not entirely clear, though several factors appear to have contributed to its fulmination and spread. Trade restrictions imposed after the Song conquest of Shu may well have been the primary cause of unrest, exacerbated by bad weather, and the overly punctilious application of laws by the magistrate of Chengdu. The rebels were initially helped by the fact that the walls of many towns and cities in Sichuan had either been destroyed after the Song conquest, or intentionally allowed to

crumble. Events outside of Sichuan, the border troubles with the Liao and Tanguts also prevented the court from turning the full weight of the Song military on the rebels. Yet it also seems clear from the persistence of the rebellion for two years in the face of repeated government victories and the ruthless slaughter of the rebels that the underlying discontent ran deep. Perhaps the most obvious acknowledgment of the depth of that discontent, and its continuance even after the rebellions had been effectively suppressed, was the order in October of 996 that all common people hand in their weapons to the government within one hundred days on pain of death. This discontent may have been due to the peculiar nature of society in Sichuan. Local "magnates" who held most of the common farming population in virtual serfdom, controlled Sichuan, thus insuring a large pool of dissatisfied people. Taizong was dissuaded from breaking up this system in 997 because of the fear that a sudden change in even such an unpleasant system would reignite rebellion. Hence, there were always two possible sources of rebellion in Sichuan: oppressed commoners attempting to throw off their overlords, and the magnates themselves, fighting to resist central government influence or interference in local society.

Sichuan's particular social structure, combined with the repeatedly expressed view (in the sources related to the 993–5 rebellion but not the earlier one) that it was a land that had always been filled with bandits, produced a near hysterical anxiety in the emperor. After dispatching Zhao Changyan, one of his highest officials, to oversee the resolution of the rebellion in its later stages, he was induced to amend Zhao's orders, limiting his direct control and the location of his administration, when it was pointed out that Zhao was not only famous, but also without family. Taizong's anxiety is remarkable. It seems as if he was genuinely afraid that a prominent man without family ties might somehow take control of the rebellion in Sichuan to establish his own regime. This appears to have been the expression of some kind of general belief about the dangers of Sichuan

inasmuch as, at some point, an explicit regulation was promulgated prohibiting officials from Sichuan returning to Sichuan. This was not just the usual bureaucratic regulation concerning not serving in one's home district, Cao Keming had to sneak back into Sichuan to visit his aged mother. The appointment of Pei Zhuang as Lai Route Army Provisioning Commissioner was objected to on the grounds that he was originally from Shu and therefore "it would be inappropriate to return and send him into Shu." In Pei's case, Taizong overrode the objection, feeling Pei was trustworthy. Perhaps these fears were not unfounded, however, as the rebels had hoped to induce Cao Keming to lead them by taking his family hostage. Cao hid his mother and then raised tens of thousands of men in support of the imperial army. Clearly a prominent man of Shu could indeed command enormous pools of manpower. After all, Quan Shixiong had been a former Shu official before being forced to become the leader of the earlier rebellion. Presumably a man of proper standing could connect with the network of local magnates, garnering their support as well as their manpower. The magnates would resist a rebellion without such a leader.

The rebellion began on 23 March 993, when Wang Xiaopo, a commoner from Jincheng county, gathered up a gang and killed the magistrate of Pengshan county in Mei prefecture.[30] Wu Yuanzai, the prefect of Chengdu whose punctilious application of the laws was blamed for creating unrest, proved incapable of apprehending Wang. Wang continued his raiding for nearly a year, though without further notable achievements. Subsequent events seem to indicate, however, that the rebellion was gaining strength. Wang was killed in battle on 8 February 994, and command of his gang fell to Li Shun.[31] It was around this time that the ineffective Wu Yuanzai's replacement, Guo Zai, arrived in Sichuan.

Even as Guo was travelling to his new post, the situation was deteriorating. When he reached Zizhou, someone advised him that, "Chengdu will certainly fall. If you go, sir, then you will also receive

calamity. By waiting a few days it can be avoided." Guo angrily rejected this advice and continued on with all haste. Li Shun's initial attack on Chengdu failed to take the city, though he did burn the West Suburb Gate, and he shifted his efforts, capturing Hanzhou on 18 February, and Pengzhou, the following day. Guo Zai reached Chengdu shortly thereafter, in time to come under attack by Li's forces in his second attempt on the city. Chengdu fell on 1 March, forcing Guo to flee to Zizhou with the remaining forces. Li then proclaimed himself King of Great Shu, changed the calendar and sent troops out in all directions. The most important of these forces headed for the pass at Jianmen, to attempt to take control of the northern route into Sichuan.[32]

Alarmed by the deteriorating situation in Sichuan, on 6 March, Taizong sent Wang Jien to suppress Li Shun.[33] It should not be thought that Wang's choice was based solely upon his loyalty to Taizong, as he and his subordinates were also accomplished generals. Wang was chosen because he was a loyal general, and given extraordinary powers to put down the rebellion. Taizong explicitly sanctioned his brutality in an edict offering a choice of either amnesty for those who gave up the rebellion, or death to those who dared oppose the imperial army.[34] This virtually guaranteed a campaign of annihilation. It is noteworthy that Taizong was not disturbed by the immense death and destruction his army caused as Taizu had been. And in a strange mirror of the mutiny of part of the imperial army in the first campaign and rebellion, a similar, though much smaller, mutiny also occurred. But where Taizu had been reluctant to execute the families of the mutineers, Taizong had to be persuaded not to.

Perhaps the greatest tactical concern as Wang and his forces were heading to Sichuan was that Li Shun's forces would take control of Jianzhou and the passes into Sichuan. If the rebels held Jianmen and could block or destroy the trestle road, the imperial army would have much greater difficulty in rapidly bringing its full weight to bear. Such a delay would allow the rebellion to grow in strength and vastly

prolong it. As was so often the case in Chinese history, the strategic significance of particular historically important places was well known to both sides. Shortly after capturing Chengdu, Li dispatched two particularly strong armies, both purportedly a hundred thousand men strong, to the north, one heading for Jian prefecture, and the other for Zitong. The Jian prefecture army under Yang Guang was tasked to raid Jian prefecture and presumably hold it against any imperial troops attempting to enter Sichuan from the north. A smaller force of several thousand men was directed against the prefectural seat, Jianzhou.[35] The Zitong army under Xiang Ligui was tasked to besiege and capture Zitong.

Jianzhou was not well garrisoned, and Shangguan Zheng was only able to muster a force of a few hundred soldiers in its defense. Still, he marched out to fight the approaching rebels, joined on the way by Su Han and his bodyguard. They met and defeated the several thousand-strong rebel force on 27 March, almost completely annihilating it. All those captured were beheaded, and their left ears taken as proof, while only about three hundred rebels escaped the battle to return to Chengdu. These hapless survivors ultimately fared no better, however, as a furious Li Shun ordered them beheaded outside of the east gate of the city for alarming the other rebels.[36] All this took place even before Wang Jien had reached Sichuan, and it made his entry much easier. The complete annihilation of the Jianzhou rebel force also took place before Taizong's edict ordered such extreme sanction. The unexpected victory greatly pleased Taizong, and both Shangguan and Su were promoted. The Jian prefecture rebel army was not wholly unsuccessful however, and it did capture several surrounding prefectural seats as well as many of the subsidiary towns and settlements of Jian prefecture.

The Zitong rebel army met unexpectedly determined resistance. The prefect Zhang Yong, along with the Army Supervisor, Lu Bin, alarmed by the rising rebellion of Wang Xiaopo and then Li Shun, had begun to organize the prefecture's dilapidated defenses and drill

troops. They were able to muster more than three thousand soldiers and more than a thousand strong, brave men, all placed under the command of the various officials. Zhang commandeered the money and silk from Mianzhou for his war chest, turned the available copper and iron to making arrowheads, cut down trees to make clubs, had cloth twisted into ropes, and sent a messenger to court to ask for troops. When Chengdu was initially attacked, Lu Bin led the forces of ten prefectures in a failed attempt to rescue it from Li Shun. Returning to Zitong, Lu took charge of a project to dig a channel letting water from the Zitong River into the moat.

When the rebel army reached the city, Zhang and Lu ascended to the ramparts to observe the enemy. Lu was so encouraged by the unarmored and poor state of the rebel troops that he asked permission to make a sally from the north gate and attack them. Zhang refused, seeing it as an obvious trick designed to make them open the gates and lure them out. He also expected that fifth columnists within the city were prepared to exploit the uncertainty of the populace to coordinate with the besieging army and seize control. Before he had even finished speaking, some troops called out to the rebels from one of the turrets, and received a response from the besieging force. Those men were quickly beheaded. Lu then suddenly sallied forth and clashed with the rebels more than thirty times, causing them to withdraw slightly.[37]

The rebels suddenly returned to the attack with ladders and fire-carts. Their attack continued into the night, terrifying the city's inhabitants. Zhang then brought his siege engines into play, raining rocks onto the rebels, as well as launching fire arrows down from the walls. The rebels once again withdrew to regroup. At some later point (the sources are unclear on this), the rebels brought their siege machinery to bear on the city's northwest corner. Zhang openly sent a force of five hundred infantry and cavalry to the east gate, knowing that enemy observers on Mt. Niutou would see the movement. Assuming that a sally from the east gate was imminent, they set an

ambush with more than ten thousand troops. Meanwhile, Zhang dispatched a hundred dare-to-dies, let down by rope, to burn their siege equipment. They burned from noon until late afternoon, entirely destroying them. Several further attempts to scale the walls were also beaten back.[38] On another occasion, the rebels took advantage of a north wind that blew day and night to launch a fire attack, furiously attacking the north gate. Zhang Yong and Lu Bin led troops to defend the gate, standing in the gate among the rocks and arrows, resolutely defending the position without budging. Chen Shiqing, who was a skilled archer, personally shot several hundred enemy soldiers.[39]

The failure of the Jianzhou attack, and the continuing siege of Zitong, seems to have stymied Li, effectively dooming his enterprise. The direct route to Chengdu was still open. Given the critical importance of Jianzhou, it is surprising that Li did not make a second attempt to capture it. His forces still vastly outnumbered those available to Shangguan Zheng and Su Han, and his position in Chengdu was still secure. But the continuing siege of Zitong was tying down a large number of his troops, while many of the others, judging by the subsequent imperial army re-conquest, were occupied in capturing and holding much of the surrounding territory. Li was badly overextended at that point, and could not muster the force necessary for a second attempt without abandoning some of his other objectives. He might also have imagined that his position was sufficiently secure because he held all of the surrounding positions, giving him a defense in depth weakened only slightly by the failure of the Jianzhou attack and the continued resistance at Zitong. Perhaps both conditions were true, but regardless, the failure to make Jianzhou's capture the first priority was a critical mistake. Li Shun's great territorial gains obfuscated deep flaws in strategy and execution.

Li's first defeats at the hands of small, hastily gathered imperial forces seemed surprising when contrasted with his rapid initial expansion. There were two reasons for this apparent contradiction. First, unlike Quan Shixiong's rebellion, where part of his force had

originally been Shu soldiers, Li's forces were entirely composed of untrained men. Their organization, fighting capabilities, and morale would have been poor, and as they repeatedly demonstrated, were no match for any Song army in the field, despite their great number. Second, the rebels depended upon the poor state of city defenses for their most notable successes. The walls and defenses of towns and cities throughout the areas of China conquered by the Song army had been demolished, slighted, or allowed to crumble. This had been done in order to prevent the rise of regional powers in opposition to the Song central government, but it left those towns and cities vulnerable to rebellions. Weakly garrisoned, the imperial army units based in those cities were actually more vulnerable than in the field. Immersed in a possibly hostile population and forced to spread themselves out over inadequate defenses, they could be defeated in detail, as happened at Chengdu. Properly and vigorously led, however, the imperial forces were nearly invincible against the rebels.

The imperial army entered Sichuan unopposed and marched directly down the main road to Chengdu, while smaller forces cleared and secured Jian prefecture and the areas to the east of Wang's line of advance. Cao Xi led a force from Jiameng to Qingshanzhen. When he reached Laoxi on 24 May, he was forced to assault two rebel forts with more than ten thousand troops set up in the narrow area between the mountains and the river, which he successfully did, beheading three thousand men. When Cao reached Qingshanzhen the following day, he found that it had already been burned to the ground and continued on to retake Langzhou. Meanwhile, Hu Zhengwei, operating farther west, defeated five thousand rebels and captured Bazhou.

The main army under Wang Jien reached the border of Mian prefecture on 30 May, where it appears to have paused to regroup and consolidate its initial gains. On 2 June, part of the main army defeated a rebel force at Yankouzhai, taking five hundred heads and completing the pacification of Jian prefecture. With his communications secure, Wang drove into Mian prefecture on 13 June,

crushing a rebel army with its back to the Fu River near the prefectural seat. A large number were killed, and a multitude drowned in the pursuit that followed. Mianzhou, the prefectural seat, was recovered the following day.[40] Having seized the initiative, Wang turned his force toward Chengdu and Li Shun. The imperial army overran the city on 17 June, defeating an estimated hundred thousand rebels as well as capturing Li Shun and the rebel leadership. Much like Wang Quanbin three decades earlier, Wang Jien ordered thirty thousand captured rebels beheaded. Although much fighting remained, Zitong, on the verge of falling after more than eighty days under siege was only relieved on 29 June (Lu Bin captured twenty thousand rebels in the pursuit that followed), Wang had accomplished his assigned mission of suppressing Li Shun less than four months after being appointed to the task.[41]

Wang's rapid victory caused a minor crisis at court. Having carried out his assignment so well, a proper reward had to be given. The Secretariat-Chancellery suggested that Wang be promoted to Commissioner of the Court of Palace Attendants, but Taizong balked at promoting a eunuch to a position that would have diminished, he felt, the power of the executive. The Prime Minister responded that, given his merit, it was the only position appropriate. The emperor angrily rejected that, and ordered Zhang Ji and Qian Ruoshui to come up with a solution.Their solution was to create the new position of Commissioner of Clear Proclamations.[42] While the court was dealing with the problem of how to reward Taizong's longtime retainer, however, the rebellion in Sichuan showed no signs of abating.

Zhang Yu takes over

Li Shun's capture, and the recovery of Chengdu by the imperial army, did not end rebellion in Sichuan. Indeed, imperial control extended scarcely three miles from the suburbs of Chengdu. A new rebel leader, Zhang Yu, attacked and captured eight prefectures along the Yangzi region in southern and eastern Sichuan the same day Li was captured.[43] Zhang Yu was purportedly part of Li Shun's gang, which, if true, would make the seriousness of the rebellion much clearer. The near simultaneous seizure of eight prefectures along the Yangzi indicates a very high level of planning and coordination, not to mention large numbers of men and supplies. The scope of Li Shun's ambitions, apparently the conquest of all of Sichuan, is apparent in Zhang Yu's actions. Having taken the provincial capital and several of the surrounding prefectures, Li was moving to expand his control south and east when the imperial army arrived to bring his reign to an end. This may also explain Li's failure to mount a second attempt to capture Jianzhou. Having already transferred the majority of his forces and efforts to the south and east in preparation for expansion along the Yangzi, he had nothing left to shore up his failed northern effort. If so, he made a serious strategic error in shifting his strength to the Yangzi before consolidating his northern defenses. The scope of Zhang's activities indicates that, regardless of his affiliations, a sizable number of people were still available to feed a rebellion. Of equal note is that while the rebellion had shifted dramatically to the south and east, it still remained in the Han Chinese areas of the Chengdu plain.

Mopping up operations continued in northeastern and central Sichuan, but rebellion still raged in southern and eastern Sichuan. Li Shun and eight of his subordinates' execution in the market of Fengxiang on 6 July was rather beside the point, as their elimination seems to have had no effect on the continuing rebellion.[44] The heroic resistance of Qin Chuanxu, the Director in Chief of Kaizhou, failed to

save his prefectural seat and he immolated himself rather than surrender to the rebels. The rebels took advantage of Kaizhou's fall to attack Kuizhou. The resulting battle at Xijinkou on 30 June was quite different though, as they met several thousand elite imperial troops who had force-marched to suppress them. This force, under Bai Jiyun, entered Kuizhou and then sallied from the city unexpectedly. A second imperial force under Jie Shouyong attacked the rebels simultaneously in the rear. This coordinated attack resulted in the greatest slaughter of any battle during the suppression campaign. More than twenty thousand rebels were beheaded, the stream was entirely blocked with bodies and the water ran red downstream from the battle. Tens of thousands of pieces of armor were captured as well as more than a thousand boats. Once again the staggering scale of the bloodshed contrasted starkly with the continuing strength of the rebellion.

A rebel attack on Shi prefecture on 21 July was driven off. A week later, on 28 July, the Lai circuit expeditionary army defeated a rebel force at Guang'anjun, a twenty thousand man force was defeated at Jialingjiangkou, and a third rebel force was defeated at Xifangxi in He prefecture with a large number captured or beheaded. Despite these repeated defeats, rebel military activity continued apace. On 7 August, a rebel force attacking Ling prefecture was attacked and defeated by the prefect.[45] The rebel siege of Meizhou was finally forced to give up on 10 August after more than a month of determined resistance.

Some five months after Wang Jien had been dispatched to Sichuan, and more than a year after Wang Xiaopo had begun the rebellion, the disturbance was showing few signs of subsiding. The imperial army had repeatedly defeated rebel forces, recaptured many towns, and generally strengthened the position of the central government, without breaking down resistance. A new tack was tried on 23 September, with the proclamation of a general amnesty for those rebels who ceased their activities. The effects of the amnesty appear to have been minimal, or, at least, not noteworthy. Perhaps

equally as important, Wang Jien had effectively stopped campaigning, choosing instead to enjoy himself in Chengdu. By October, the persistence of the rebellion and Wang's inactivity convinced Taizong to dispatch Zhao Changyan, a member of the council of state, to Sichuan to take overall command.

No sooner had Zhao been dispatched, however, then Taizong began to have misgivings about it. A Buddhist monk advised him that, based upon the shape of Zhao's nose, it was inadvisable to send him to handle affairs in Shu. Perhaps two weeks after he had departed, someone else opined that a man with as much fame as Zhao would be hard to control in the future after he spent a long time in control of troops in Sichuan.[46] An already alarmed emperor is also reported to have received a secret memorial from Kou Zhun, a former high court official then in disgrace as prefect of Fengzhou, who advised him that Zhao was not only famous, but without sons. Taizong's response was that," There are no loyal officials in the court, no one's words touched on this."[47] He ordered Zhao to remain in Fengzhou and direct affairs in Sichuan from there. Kou Zhun, for his part, was promoted back into the council of state.

The new officials who came in with Zhao Changyan almost immediately improved the situation in Sichuan. Zhang Yong (to be distinguished from the defender of Zitong, Zhang Yong) took over control of Chengdu (then demoted to Yizhou) and took steps both to improve the food supply and spur Wang Jien to return to active campaigning. When Zhang arrived, he found that there was less than half a month's supply of grain for the thirty thousand troops in the city, salt was extremely expensive, and that private stores of grain were being hoarded. He lowered the price of salt, which induced people to bring grain to the capital where they could trade it for salt, bringing in several hundred thousand pecks of grain by the end of the month. This not only improved the supply situation, it also improved the quality of the grain available as well. Zhang's second alteration of the supply system was designed to force Wang Jien to return to

campaigning. Up until that point, the army's horses in Chengdu were fed grain because Li Shun had burned the fields within the city. Zhang shifted to providing cash for the horses' provisions. When Wang Jien objected that the horses could not eat cash, Zhang pointed out that, while there was no grass within the city for the horses, there was grass outside the city. It was only a problem if the army stayed inside the walls. To drive home his point, Zhang told Wang that he had already informed the throne of his change in practice. This also improved the grain situation for the people, who had previously been in competition with the horses for food.[48]

Wang's return to campaigning yielded immediate results. Wei Shaoqin defeated a rebel force at Mt. Xueshe, and rooted out Shuangliu and other forts, accepting the surrender of tens of thousands of rebels. Yang Qiong advanced on Qiong and Shu prefectures to cleanse the rebel haunts, thus capturing Shuzhou on 5 November. Cao Xi defeated a rebel force at Anguozhen, executing its leader, and beheading or capturing a great number. Wang Jien sent more than thirty captured rebels to Zhang Yong for punishment. Zhang promptly freed them, to the astonishment of an enraged Wang. Zhang explained this as the successful transformation of bandits into citizens, but it really signaled a radical change in policy from one of annihilating rebels to winning them over by kindness.[49] Given that there was no official imperial decree to that effect, we must assume that the decision to do so was local, made by either Zhang Yong or perhaps his superior Zhao Changyan, and acceptable because the situation was improving. Even so, Sichuan had not yet been completely pacified. Qiongzhou was recovered on 22 November, and Jiazhou on 16 January 995. But it was not until 2 April that Zhang Yu's head was taken and circulated to demonstrate that the rebellion was over.[50]

The rebellion was yet another indictment of Taizong's rule, a sign that he had not only failed in external military affairs, but in internal administration as well. He had secured his throne by murdering family

members rather than any demonstration of fitness to rule. The people of Sichuan paid the price for Taizong's military and political weakness as the Song army was unleashed to brutally suppress the manifestation of his failed rule. One of Taizong's few successes was naming an heir-apparent. When he died on 8 May 997, he was duly succeeded by his son and designated heir.[51]

[1] XCB 26.597–9.

[2] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 235–44.

[3] These statements claiming it had been broken are the only evidence for the existence of this agreement.There is no information on the formal provisions of the agreement.

[4] XCB 27.602.

[5] XCB 27.608–9.

[6] LS 11.120

[7] LS 11.119.

[8] XCB 27.610.

[9] XCB 27.611–2

[10] XCB 27.612–3.

[11] LS 11.121; XCB 27.612–3.

[12] The lower reaches of the Juma River where it ran east–west appears to have been the de facto border at that time.

[13] It is likely that a large percentage of the drowned men were transport troops and the civilians the army was escorting out of Liao territory.

[14] LS 11.121–2; XCB 27.613.

[15] XCB 27.613–4.

[16] XCB 27.614–6.

[17] XCB 27.617.

[18] Taizong had changed his sons' names again on 4 September 986. The King of Chen, Yuanyou, became Yuanxi; the King of Han, Yuanxiu, became Yuankan, and the King of Ji, Yuanjun, became Yuanfen.SS 5.79; XCB 27.621.

[19] Lau Nap-Yin, "Making War for Peace?", pp. 185–6.

[20] My position here is quite similar to David Wright's with respect to the Liao, see Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity*, p. 85, and Tsang Shui-lung, "War and Peace in Northern Sung China," 1997, p. 69. Tsang and I both emphasize that the Song did not intend to destroy the Liao, and sought only the limited objective of capturing the Sixteen Prefectures. Wright makes the important point that the Liao empire could not have survived losing the Sixteen Prefectures. Hence, from the Liao perspective, an attempt to capture the Sixteen Prefectures was an existential threat and warranted an all out response. For the Song, the issue was not existential and thus could never justify a complete mobilization.

[21] Shui-lung Tsang believes that this was the first instance of a Liao army making regular logistic preparations for a campaign. Shui-lung Tsang, "War and Peace in Northern Sung China," 92 fn. 8.

[22] XCB 28.633–7.

[23] LS 12.131–2.

[24] LS 12.132.

[25] XCB 29.658.

[26] LS 12.133.

[27] LS 12.134.

[28] Yelü Xiuge's biography claims that he was the only one willing to fight the Song force commanded by Liu Tingrang. He defeated Liu north of the Sha River inflicting tens of thousands of casualties and capturing an inestimable amount of booty. Cheng Guangyu discounts the story since it does not occur in the annals of LS, XCB, or SS. Cheng Guangyu, *Song Taizong Dui Liao Zhanzheng*, pp. 175–6.

[29] Most of the sources for the 993 rebellion are compiled in Su Jinyuan and Li Chunpu, *Songdai Sanci Nongcun Shiliao Huibian*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1963, pp. 1–62. The rebellion itself has been summarized and analyzed by Zhang Yinglin, "Songchu Sichuan Wang Xiaopo, Li Shun zhi Luan," Qinghua Xuebao, 12 (1937), 315–35.

[30] SS 5.91.

[31] SS 5.92–3.

[32] XCB 35.766–7.

[33] XCB 35.767.

[34] XCB 35.774.

[35] SS 307.10121.

[36] XCB 35.772

[37] XCB 36.785–6.

[38] SS 307.10121; XCB 36.786. Li Tao's figure of two hundred thousand for the attack on Zitong probably combined the two hundred thousand-man rebel forces sent from Chengdu. All these figures are certainly exaggerations; the logistic requirements for maintaining a hundred thousand men in the field, even in an area as rich as Sichuan, would prohibit such a concentration. By comparison, the entire Song force with two separate armies invading Sichuan in 964 was sixty thousand men. Presumably, both rebel armies would have followed the main road running from Chengdu to Jianzhou, with the force detailed to capture Zitong stopping there and the Jianzhou force continuing on.The SS account is surprisingly more precise than Li Tao's in distinguishing separate rebel armies.

[39] XCB 36.786.

[40] XCB 36.784.

[41] XCB 36.786–7.

[42] XCB 36.792. The significance of the Commissioner of Palace Attendants position in the Song is unclear, though Taizong was clearly concerned that it was too powerful to be filled by a eunuch, like Wang Jien. It was a powerful eunuch office during the Tang dynasty, but it was first filled in the Song on 23 December 1081. See Gong Yanming, *Songdai Guanzhi Cidian*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1997, p. 130.The Commissioner of Clear Proclamations was also a eunuch office, ranked 6a.

[43] XCB 36.788–9.

[44] SS 5.94.

[45] SS 5.94.

[46] XCB 36.796.

[47] Sima Guang, *Sushui Jiwen*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006, p. 24.

[48] XCB 36.798.

[49] XCB 36.798–9.

[50] SHY:B 11/4a.6925.

[51] XCB 41.862.

10

The end of the beginning

> "Those who devised such plans for Your Majesty should be condemned and beheaded… How could we wish to abandon our ancestral temples and our altars to the spirit of the land and go as far away as Chu (the South) or Shu (Sichuan)?"[1]

Taizong's third son, the designated Heir-Apparent, who would posthumously be known as Zhenzong, almost did not make it to the throne as his father had planned. In a near repeat of Taizong's own ascension, Wang Jien was preparing to intercede to place Taizong's eldest son on the throne instead. Prime Minister Lu Duan blocked this attempt, demonstrating both the remnants of the more retainer-based ruling style of Taizong, and the force of the newer, more institutionalized system that the second emperor had inadvertently created.[2] Apart from this minor hiccup, however, Zhenzong came to the throne without the political uncertainty of his father. He therefore did not have to prove himself worthy of the throne through military accomplishments, or even particularly adept rule, and faced the serious military problems his father had bequeathed him more as questions of policy rather than politics. It is perhaps for this reason that he proved so much more effective than his father in resolving the empire's border problems. Temperament, of course, played an important role too, but it is hard to parse the effects of environment and events from personality. On occasion, Zhenzong could be as belligerent as his father, despite his palace upbringing, secure political position, and distance from any personal humiliation on the battlefield. Many historians have criticized Zhenzong's resolution of the Liao–Song conflict in particular as a national humiliation, but,

whatever the merits of those indictments, the fact remains that his policy choices resulted in a peaceful northeastern border for more than a century. This was something that Taizong had been entirely unable to accomplish under any circumstances.

Zhenzong's success in reaching a long-term peace on the border was not the result of brilliant leadership on his, or any of his officials or generals' part. Indeed, the debates over military policy at his court were frequently marked more by political maneuvering than by honest efforts to figure out the best course of action. The policy that eventually emerged, as distinguished from an explicit policy choice, which Zhenzong never managed to make, was to defend strongly the existing border, but not to attack the Liao or initiate peace talks. Although this was probably the result of Zhenzong's indecision, and certainly left the initiative in the Liao court's hands, it was not necessarily a bad policy. Zhenzong can only be faulted for his defensive-mindedness if he had a reasonable expectation that an offensive posture would succeed in obtaining his military or political objectives. When he first ascended to the throne, he had a single, simple military objective with respect to the Liao: to capture the Sixteen Prefectures. But Zhenzong was at least as aware as we are of what happened when his father tried to obtain that objective. He therefore had a reasonable expectation that he could not capture the Sixteen Prefectures. In the absence of that possibility, he could only hope to reach the negative objective of foiling Liao attempts to capture land from his own empire. This understanding, whether explicit or intuitive, combined with increasing Liao military pressure to change the emperor's objective to creating a stable border. It was this conceptual shift that allowed a treaty to be concluded in 1005.

The Liao court, for its part, seems to have held quite closely to the goal of establishing a peaceful border with the Song from early on. As we have seen, and the Liao knew so well, the Liao army did not enjoy anything approaching overwhelming superiority over the Song army. The two armies were actually quite evenly matched, a condition

further emphasized by their mutual difficulty in fighting in the Sixteen Prefectures–Northern Hebei area. Many historians have mistaken the Liao's offensive military strategy and tactics, particularly as compared to the Song's defensive military strategy and tactics, for Liao military superiority. This has also caused some confusion about Liao political and territorial goals because offensive military action has been equated with expansionist intentions, or the desire to destroy the Song dynasty itself. Furthermore, many Song statesmen, and sometimes Song emperors, were fundamentally suspicious of a powerful neighboring empire that copied many Chinese imperial forms. But as the Liao court demonstrated in its settlement with the Koryo kingdom in Korea in 993, it was quite ready to reach a political settlement with a similarly inclined leadership after the respective military balance had been clarified. War was a political instrument for the Liao court, not simply a cultural imperative of their "barbarous" Kitan heritage. Their culture informed how they waged war, as well as its internal ramifications and uses, but with respect to the Song, it was pursued with a clear political purpose. This is apparent in their willingness to give up waging war against the Song as soon as that purpose was reached. Had they been driven by a cultural imperative alone, rather than a political objective, they would have been substantially unable to stop fighting in 1005.

The events leading up the Chanyuan Covenant, and the covenant itself, have been, and will probably continue to be, a perennial topic of articles on Song history. In the first footnote of his 1990 article on the Chanyuan Covenant, Nap-yin Lau lists some twenty-two previous works on the topic, and the number has increased since then.[3] His list omits several works in English and other Western languages, but any attempt to complete the list would only have value as a bibliographic exercise, since there is little disagreement over the facts of either the treaty or the events leading up to it. Two questions absorb most of the interpretive efforts (and arguments) of the majority of the works listed. First, who initiated peace talks, and, second, was the covenant

a “national humiliation” for the Song? The campaigns involved will be discussed in this chapter, but before undertaking that narrative I should explain why I will not significantly engage either of the two questions just mentioned.

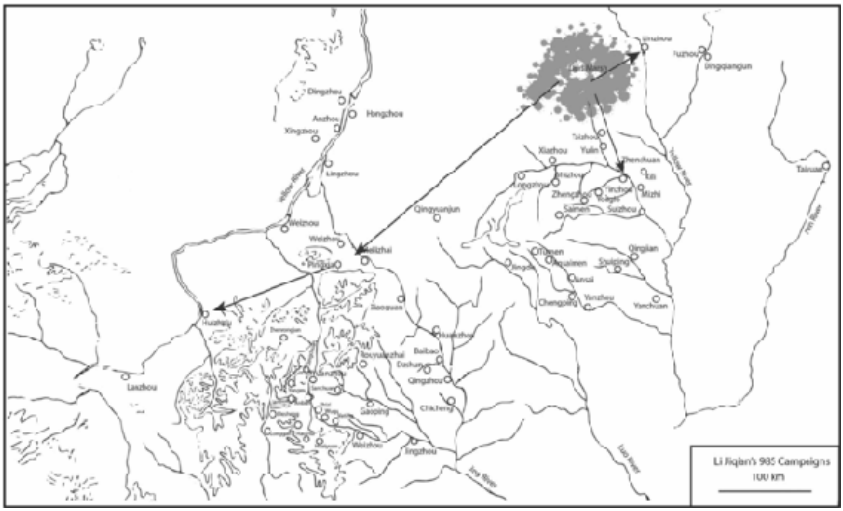
I have argued that the Liao court pursued a consistent political goal with respect to the Song, and that they were forced by circumstances to pursue that goal by offensive military action. I have also argued that Song Zhenzong gradually shifted his objective with respect to his northeast border to a position essentially in agreement with that of the Liao court. Hence, since by 1004 both sides shared the same objective, and the conditions finally obtained which allowed both to achieve that goal through negotiations, the question of who initiated the peace talks is irrelevant. Both sides were eager for peace and quickly arrived at an acceptable agreement. That the Song later came to lament the conditions of the agreement, though not the peace it brought, does not alter the fact that Zhenzong was ready to conclude a peace in 1004. Neither side, as we shall see, had won anything like a decisive victory before the covenant, so whichever party initiated peace talks, it cannot be seen as a sign of weakness or defeat. Finally, because many statesmen at the time and subsequently were very concerned to establish who initiated the peace talks, the historical records are hopelessly obfuscated by bias.

The question of “national humiliation” is political and historiographical. Zhenzong was initially pleased to conclude a peace, and was more concerned that it held than that the covenant he had sworn was unequal in the Liao court’s favor. Kou Zhun, the minister whose actions were most responsible for the peace, gained a great deal of political capital from the covenant. It was therefore in the interests of Kou’s political opponents to attack the agreement in order to undermine Kou’s position at the Song court. The agreement’s inequality, the result of poor negotiating on the Song side, provided Kou’s opponents with ample, credible ammunition with which to attack it. Zhenzong, an indecisive man to begin with, was soon

dissatisfied with the covenant. It would later become a point of mutual agreement among all political factions during the eleventh century that the dynasty was militarily weak, and that only political reform could strengthen it. I have already discussed the progression of this political position into the historiographical tradition in Chapter 2, so here it important only to remind the reader that the needs of court politics in the eleventh century strongly influenced the historical interpretation of the Chanyuan Covenant by contemporary historians, most of whom were also court officials. Due to the subsequent loss of north China to the Jurchen in the early twelfth century, as well as to later incursions by perceived "outsiders" up to and including the Western powers and Japan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some modern Chinese historians continue to describe the covenant in inflammatory terms. Such language informs nationalist rhetoric, and may satisfy some sort of emotional requirement, but it has no heuristic value with respect to the military and political events leading up to the agreement.

Zhenzong and his court were not only faced with the problem of the Liao in the northeast, they also had the difficult issue of the Tanguts in the northwest to settle. While the Liao and Tanguts were not wholly unrelated problems, trying to narrate the course of both conflicts simultaneously would be extremely confusing. I will therefore present a brief account of the Song–Tangut conflict to its denouement in 1004 first, and use it as a backdrop to the "main" Liao theatre of war. This has the very real danger of downplaying the importance of the interaction between the three courts, but since my focus has been and continues to be the interaction of war and politics on the Song court, some complexity will have to be sacrificed for the sake of clarity. I will therefore describe two separate conflicts, one between the Song and the Tanguts, and one between the Song and the Liao. Two further discussions will follow the summary of the Song–Tangut conflict and preface the account of the military campaigns, the Song's construction of a network of water defenses on its northeast

border, and the perspective of Liao foreign policy.



23. Li Jiqian's 985 campaigns

The Song–Tangut war

The war between the Song empire and the developing Tangut polity in the late tenth and very beginning of the eleventh century followed the life of the Tangut leader Li Jiqian.[4] Born in 963, Jiqian was the cousin of Li Jipeng, who became King of Xia when his older brother died in 980. The Song court had posthumously granted Jipeng's grandfather Li Yixing, the title King of Xia when he died in 967. When Jipeng decided to travel to the Song court in 982 and exchange his title for a comfortable existence in Kaifeng, Jiqian led a band of holdouts deeper into Tangut territory in preparation for a future revolt against Song control.

Li Jiqian's initial efforts were remarkable more for resilience than success, though Song attempts to suppress him were rather desultory. It was not initially clear to the Song court that Jiqian was a serious problem requiring immediate, and decisive, action. In 984, Jiqian narrowly escaped capture when a Song force attacked his camp. His mother and wife were taken by the Song in that raid, along with many of his followers. He rebounded quickly, however, and captured Yinzhou early the following year. This was a major turning point for him, since a large quantity of military supplies fell into his hands with Yinzhou's capture. He could now reward his followers, properly arm and feed his army, and demonstrate by this military success, his fitness to lead. Shortly thereafter, he overran Huizhou, razing it and its suburbs before withdrawing. Over the next year, Jiqian struggled with the Song over territory and the allegiance of the steppe peoples in the northwest, neither side really winning or losing decisively.

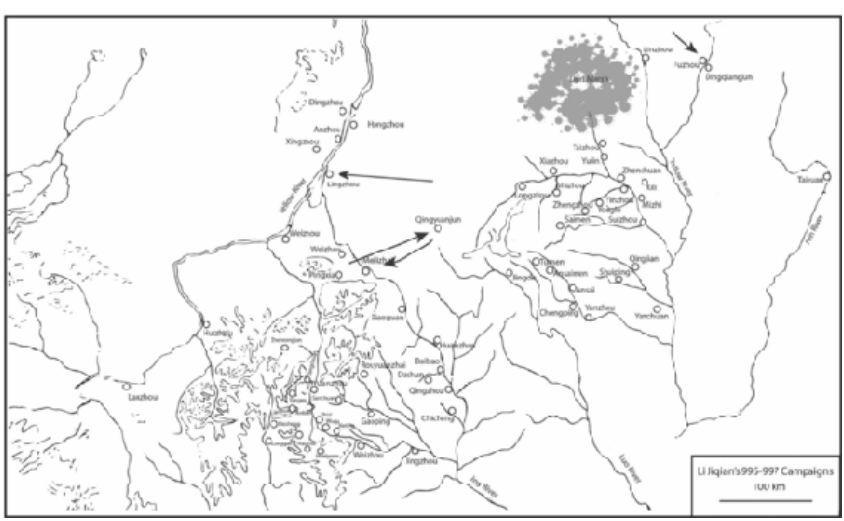
Song Taizong's failed 986 invasion opened up a new opportunity for Jiqian. He had previously taken good advantage of the Song army's northeastern preoccupation to avoid destruction, but now he officially submitted to the Liao court as a vassal and received investiture as a Liao official. Neither side was under any illusion that

this arrangement was anything more than a convenient, but tenuous, military alliance.[5] As mentioned in the previous chapter, a Liao imperial clanswoman was given to Jiqian in marriage. The Song court was quite alarmed by these developments, assuming, as they would until the early twelfth century, that the Liao–Tangut alliance was much closer than it, in fact, was. It was in the interests of both the Liao and the Tanguts, of course, to make it seem, during negotiations with the Song, that they were or could take coordinated military action. In point of fact, they never did, demonstrating quite clearly that their interests did not really coincide. Jiqian wanted recognition of his position as leader of the Tanguts, and territorial expansion. The Liao were willing to give Jiqian that recognition, as long as it served to increase the military pressure on the Song, and lead to a political settlement of the Song–Liao border. But Jiqian's territorial ambitions would conflict with Liao interests if he tried to expand in directions other than into Song territory, that is to say, into Liao lands or those of other Central Eurasian groups with whom the Liao had interests, or if he continued to make trouble after a Song–Liao agreement.

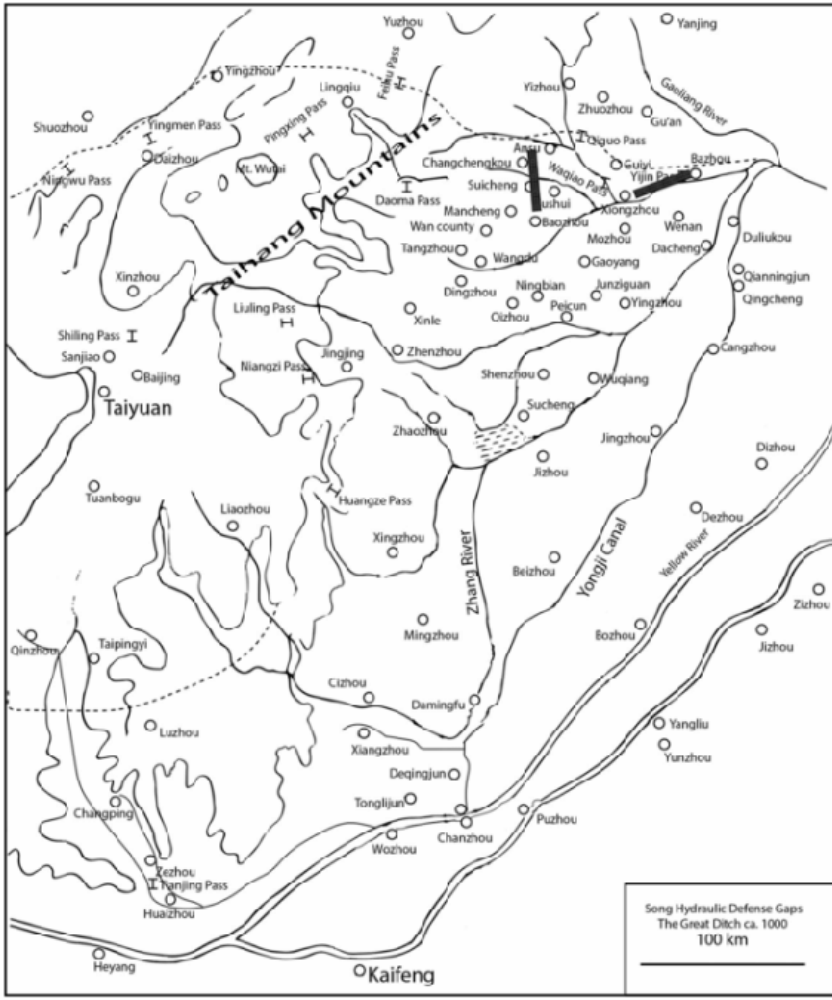
The Tangut leader was also politically savvy enough to combine his military actions against the Song with submission to the Song court. In 991, for example, Jiqian submitted a request to surrender, and was made Surveillance Commissioner of Yinzhou, bestowed the imperial surname, Zhao, and given a new name, Baoji. This was simply recognition of Jiqian's (setting aside his new name for the sake of consistency) de facto territorial influence. The Liao responded by dispatching Han Dewei to bring Jiqian back in line. Since the Tangut ruler would not come out to meet Han, he plundered the territory in Lingzhou and returned. As a consequence of this, at least as far as the Liao court could see, Jiqian quickly returned to the Liao fold. The Song court responded to this switch by sending Li Jipeng out to Xiazhou to put down Jiqian and rule the Tanguts for the Song. Rather than simplify the situation by introducing a strong Song supporter who would be able to at least diminish the power of the Tangut

threat, Jipeng's presence added a new element of confusion.

Jiqian defeated Jipeng in battle on 6 May 994, and Jipeng fled back to Xiazhou. Despite that minor victory, Jiqian sent tribute to the Song court on 9 September of the same year, and sent his younger brother to the Song court on 1 October. Still in the process of trying to wrap up the rebellion in Sichuan, Taizong responded positively to the Tangut leader's friendly gestures, and bestowed various gifts upon him on 7 December. By July of the following year (995), Jiqian returned to a more defiant stance, and in October, a report came that he had raided, and been driven off from, Qingyuanjun. On 24 April of 996, Taizong sent troops to suppress Jiqian. On 24 May, Jiqian raided Lingzhou, and again the next year, in November of 997, after Taizong died. Only two months later, in January of 998, Jiqian once again received a title from the Song court. The northwest was mostly quiet until the fall of 1001, when Jiqian once again began to cause trouble. His career came to an end on 6 January 1004, when he died of an arrow wound received in battle the previous year. His son and successor, Li Deming, proved much less troublesome to the Song court, and it would only be with the ascension of Deming's son, Yuanhao, that the Tanguts would once again become a major military threat to the Song.



24. Li Jiqian's 995–997 campaigns



25. Song hydraulic defense gaps

Song hydraulic defense system[6]

From Song Taizong's second failed campaign in 986 until the Chanyuan Covenant of 1005, the Song army adopted a defensive posture with respect to the Liao empire. Particularly in the beginning, there was great reluctance within the Song court to openly acknowledge that this was the case, or to give up entirely any discussion of another northern campaign. At the same time, neither the emperor nor his court could ignore the need to strengthen Hebei's defenses. In 987, He Chengju (946–1006), prefect of Cangzhou, proposed constructing a continuous line of canals and dikes across northern Hebei that would facilitate grain supplies, expand agriculture to support the troops, and create an obstacle for Liao troop movements. Taizong was initially inclined to accept the proposal, but other officials balked at the expense and felt it would be a sign of weakness to build such an extensive defense system. The plan as a whole was shelved, but after 993, individual local officials petitioned, and were granted the authority, to construct parts of it. Zhenzong was more amenable to He Chengju's plans, and from 1000 on, construction commenced to connect up all of the water defenses, even through the topographically difficult areas. Construction continued through 1004, and only ceased after the Chanyuan Covenant made the work unnecessary.

Although on the surface it might appear as if the construction of such a defense system was not provocative, the Liao were quite alarmed by it.[7] From a defensive standpoint, the canals, dikes, and wet-paddy fields did obstruct the movement of Liao forces, but from an offensive standpoint, the Song were building a transport and supply network capable of supporting a large number of troops in Northern Hebei. Hence, it appeared to the Liao that the system would be just as effective in supporting power projection, as in defending Song territory. The Liao court could not confidently assume that the Song

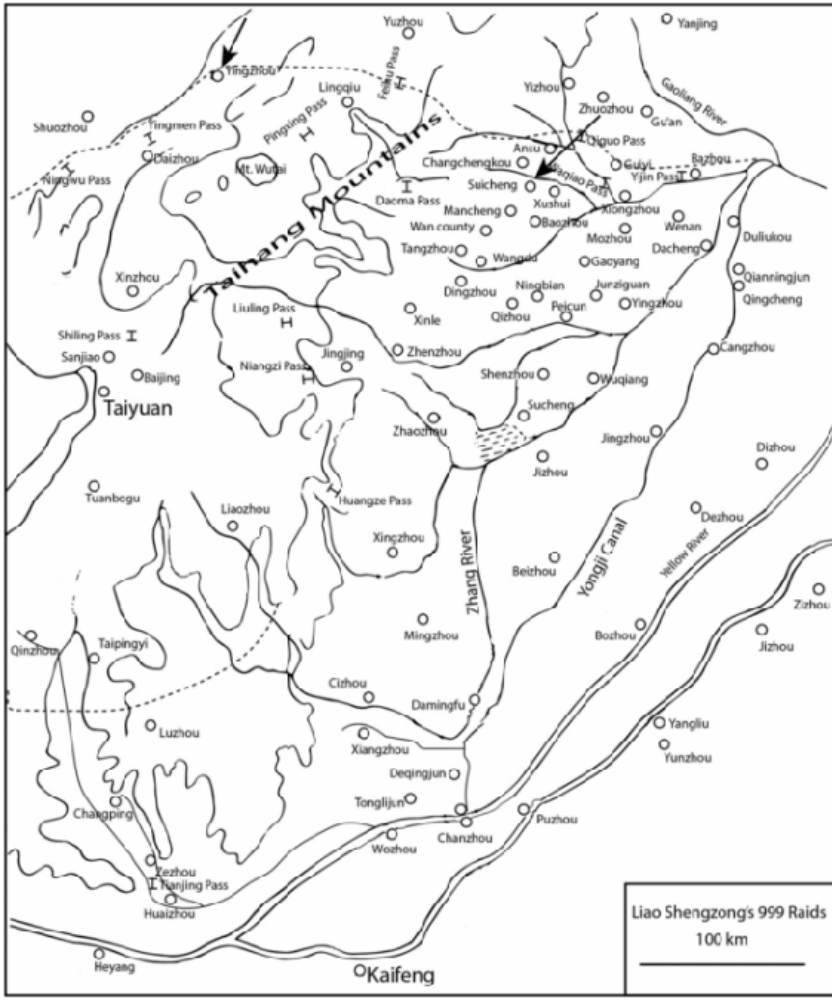
would not invade again, and regarded the canals and expanded agriculture as both a defensive and offensive problem. Remember that Zhou Shizong had launched his successful attack on the Guannan region via the canals that he had recently reopened and renovated. Liao forces therefore tried to disrupt the work on several occasions, but were unsuccessful.

The Liao army found the canal network an effective obstacle to its activities, forcing it to attack through certain routes. Initially, there were two major gaps in the defenses, between Xiong and Ba prefectures, and from the Baozhou–Ansu–Suicheng (Guangxin) area west to the foot of the mountains. The latter gap was the most difficult to span, since the terrain was not conducive to canals. Consequently, this was the most frequent invasion route for the Liao, and also frequently the site of many fruitless sieges for them. Some cities, like Suicheng, repeatedly held out against the Liao over the years.

Two aspects of the hydraulic defenses created a sense of urgency within the Liao leadership for a resolution of the conflict with the Song. First, Song defenses were becoming stronger and more complete over time. Thus, Liao ability to pressure the Song was diminishing, and might actually reach a point where they not only became incapable of effectively invading, but where the Song would be able to go over to the offensive. Second, the irrigation systems connected with the hydraulic network allowed the Song to support a larger number of troops closer to the front, and to make them less dependent upon transported food. This significantly increased the Song army's reach, power, and endurance along its northeast border. Over time, this logistical support system, which the Liao could not match, would wear down the Liao army. It was therefore imperative for the Liao court, under the control of the Dowager Empress, to win the diplomatic concessions that would establish a stable peace, before its military leverage evaporated.[8]

Of all of the raids mounted by the Liao during Zhenzong's reign, the one in 1004 was the most successful on both the tactical and

strategic level. The Liao achieved more than they hoped for: the establishment of a peaceful Liao–Song border, an annual subsidy from the Song court and the opening of border markets for trade.[9] The Chanyuan Covenant that ended the 1004 invasion, and stabilized the border for more than a century, was also one of the most important events in Northern Song political history. It secured the Song from the only power that could have threatened the dynasty's existence. The long, stable peace established by the treaty made the great cultural achievements of the eleventh century possible. But we would be wrong, or at least excessively sinocentric, to characterize the 1004 campaign as the culmination of a grand Liao plan directed toward the Song. It was one component of a linked Liao plan to secure all of the empire's borders, one of which was with the Song.



26. Liao 999 raid

Liao foreign policy (986–1005)[10]

The Liao empire secured its western border with the Xi Xia in 986, when Li Jiqian, the Xi Xia leader, became a vassal ruler under the Liao. Li had not submitted to the Song with the rest of the Tangut leaders in 982. He, and his successors, disrupted the northwestern border of the Song as long as their territories abutted one another. While the Liao–Xi Xia relationship was never as friendly as the Song court believed, it nevertheless stabilized the Liao empire's western border.

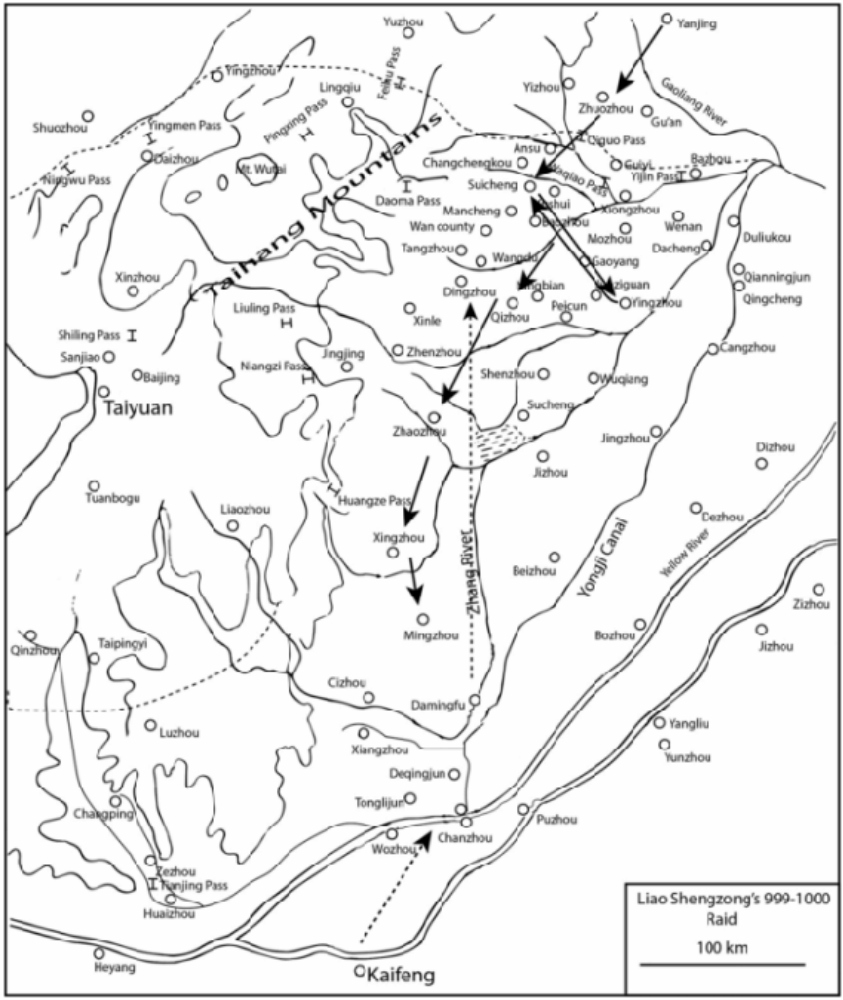
In 992–3, the Liao temporarily stabilized their eastern border, abutting the Koryo kingdom in Korea. Their methods presaged those used in dealing with the Song. Indeed, the Liao invasion of Korea was virtually a dress rehearsal of what happened in 1004. A large Liao army invaded and advanced south, encountering limited resistance along the way. The Koryo king, Songjong, led a large force north to meet the Liao. Confronted by a powerful army, the Liao commander negotiated a settlement. The settlement transferred Koryo's vassal status from the Song to the Liao, effectively stabilizing the border.

It is unclear why the Liao waited until 999 to begin attacking the Song in earnest. The Liao court may have been occupied with unrest around the empire (there was trouble with the Xi Xia in 992, and with other Tangut tribes in 997) or the shift may have been due to a change in the military leadership after the death of Yelü Xiuge, the Liao commander in chief, in 998.[11] In any case, in 999, the Liao began raids on the Song that might best be described as a series of reconnaissance-in-forces. The Liao failed to capture Suicheng in 999, although they defeated a Song force nearby during the winter. A second Liao army defeated a Song army near Yingzhou the same year. The Liao withdrew early the following year as Zhenzong organized a Song counter-attack (but not a counter-invasion).

The Liao emperor personally commanded another invasion in the

winter of 1001. Once again the Liao defeated a Song army near Suicheng and withdrew as the Song counter-attacked. There were further clashes in 1002 and 1003. A Song general by the name of Wang Jizhong was captured during the 1003 attack on Dingzhou. Wang had been a personal confidant of Zhenzong, and became a key figure in negotiating the Chanyuan Covenant in 1004–5.

In the late autumn of 1004, a Liao army commanded by the emperor and the empress dowager invaded Song territory. A second Liao army managed to capture Suicheng, but most of the Song cities were bypassed with little or no effort to take them. Liao forces rode directly south, destroying a Song force near Mingzhou, before reaching Chanyuan. There they faced a massive Song army commanded by Zhenzong himself. After an initial skirmish, both sides negotiated a settlement and the Liao army withdrew.



27. Liao 999–1000 raids

The Liao invasion and Zhenzong's first campaign (12 October 999–29 February 1000)[12]

In August of 999, Liao emperor Shengzong began mobilizing his troops for an autumn invasion of the Song. This signaled a significant change in Liao policy with respect to the Song, though not in goals. The Liao court still wanted to establish a peaceful border with the Song, at a minimum sanctioning Liao control over the Sixteen Prefectures and opening border markets, and at a maximum ceding the Guannan region to the Liao. By the middle of 999, however, the detente that existed between the two courts had clearly settled into a stalemate, rather than a period of quiet leading to a resolution of the issues. Of even more immediate concern for the Liao court was the possibility that the Song might invade Liao territory again. Shengzong, strongly influenced, if not completely dominated by his mother, the Dowager Empress Xiao (Chengtian), decided that progress had stalled, and that only a policy of applying military pressure to the Song would advance Liao interests and forestall a possible Song invasion. This policy shift demonstrated both his confidence in his army's ability to defeat the Song army, and the political support within his court for such action. Although Shengzong's new policy would ultimately succeed in establishing a peaceful border, the Song army almost immediately demonstrated how costly it would be. Indeed, Song defenses strengthened in response to Shengzong's policy of military pressure, increasing the cost in blood and treasure, and, consequently, in political will, over the next five years.

Shengzong and his mother reached Yanzhou on 12 October to lead the campaign personally, which officially began on 31 October. The Song court had been aware of the Liao troop mobilization for several months and had dispatched reinforcements to the border beginning in August.[13] Song troops attacked and defeated the Liao

vanguard in two battles in early November, but Shengzong continued his invasion and attacked Suicheng in early December. Despite the city's inadequate defense preparations and the Dowager Empress's personal supervision of the assault, Suicheng was able to hold out. The city's defenders took advantage of the freezing temperatures to form a coating of ice on the walls by pouring buckets of water over them. This utterly frustrated the Liao army, which apparently relied upon escalade to overcome the walls, forcing it to break off the siege after a few days.[14]

The campaign had begun poorly for Shengzong (and Chengtian), and he was forced to leave Suicheng in his rear, threatening his communications. It was too risky to continue for long under these circumstances, so, after several minor victories, the Liao army returned to attack Suicheng again. Shengzong fared slightly better the second time, defeating a Song force outside the city, but was still unable to capture Suicheng.[15] That minor success would prove to be the high point of the campaign. The Liao army was almost exclusively a cavalry force, and performed poorly in sieges.

Zhenzong personally took the field in the middle of January 1000, ostensibly to capture the Sixteen Prefectures rather than to defend Hebei from the Liao invasion.[16] Clearly, it was still not politically advisable to announce a defensive imperial military operation. Although the goal of Zhenzong's first campaign was defensive, several Song commanders successfully raided Liao territory, winning significant local victories. Zhenzong took up position with a large force at Tianxiongjun, a good distance from the Liao, leaving Fu Qian with more than eighty thousand infantry and cavalry at Dingzhou to bear the brunt of the invasion.[17] Fu adopted a passive defense in Dingzhou consistent with the border military policy in place since Taizong's second failed campaign,[18] but his subordinates accused him of cowardice for not opposing the Liao army in the field. One even compared Fu unfavorably to an old woman.[19] While the aggressive spirit displayed by Fu's subordinates was admirable, and

indicates that at least some in the Song army were ready, willing, and (possibly) able to fight the Liao, his passive defense strategy was not by definition wrong. Indeed, given that the Liao invasion had not captured any major cities, and that the most significant Liao successes had come in the open field, Fu's strategy was rational, albeit conservative. By not taking the field, Fu denied the Liao the opportunity to either win glory, or weaken the cities' defenses, by defeating the Song army. He thus denied the Liao army the possibility of victory, though at the cost of also denying the Song army the possibility of victory.

Fu Qian's strategy was probably the most reliable defense strategy, but many officials at court and officers in the army were not convinced that a passive defense would be effective. Not only did it leave the initiative in Liao hands, it also ran contrary to their idea of sovereignty to allow a foreign army to ride through their country unopposed. The Liao overran several forts in early February, but then failed again to capture Suicheng despite a determined assault for two days and nights. Many Song officials and officers demanded an active defense, fighting the Liao army directly by attacking its raiding forces and invading Liao territory. They knew that the Song army had not won the majority of its encounters with the Liao army in the field, but they also knew that the Song army had not always lost when it fought the Liao in the field. Thus, although the chance of defeat was high, there was a significant group of officials and officers who preferred directly opposing the Liao in the field to a more reliable passive defense relying on city walls.

The Liao army continued to raid into February, ravaging Qi, Zhao, Xing, and Ming prefectures in a systematic effort to create a devastated buffer zone on the border. Their depredations drove the rural population into the city and suburbs of Zhending, blocking the roads with refugees. This was the great weakness of a passive defense, the Liao could be prevented from capturing cities or defeating armies, but they could freely attack the unprotected populace. Pressure

mounted for a more active strategy, but Zhenzong still temporized. Fu Qian was indirectly encouraged by the Song court to adopt a more active strategy, but the fact that he was not directly ordered to do so by Zhenzong suggests that the court itself had not reached a consensus. Fu was neither sacked nor explicitly ordered to conduct an active defense. Still, the court wanted Fu to do something. Fu therefore sent eight thousand cavalry and two thousand infantry to Gaoyangguan in preparation for an attack on Liao territory; he would follow shortly with the rest of the army. Zhenzong sent a vanguard force to Dingzhou to join with Fu in the attack, but nothing came of the planned attack. Whether through cowardice, or conflicting orders, Fu and the main army stayed in Dingzhou.

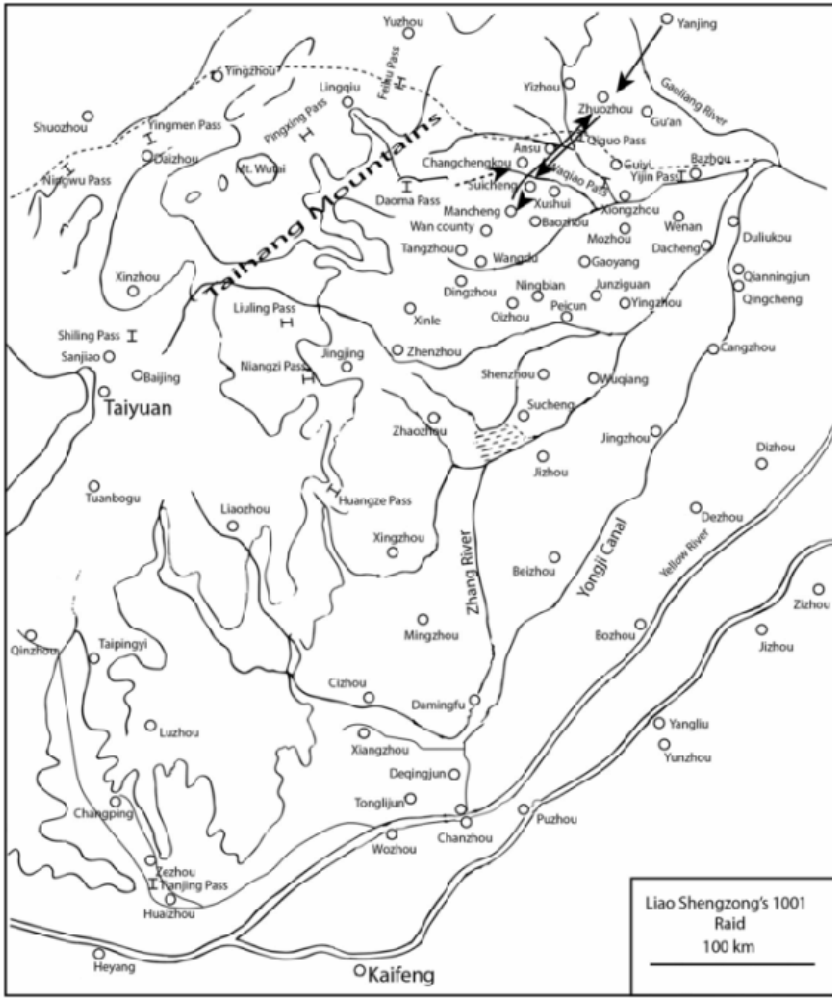
Zhenzong ordered a policy review on 5 February. Despite an extensive discussion of the situation and possible plans, no decision was made. Several officials agreed that one of the main problems was cowardly commanders. They proposed executing Fu Qian just as Zhou Shizong had done with Fan Aineng and He Hui after the battle of Gaoping (see Chapter 3).[20] Despite their indecision, it was clear that the general opinion of the officials was tilting toward taking a more active approach. At the same time, the Liao began to withdraw by themselves; they had failed to achieve anything significant after campaigning for more than two months, during the winter. Since they lived off the land, they could not return to areas that they had already exhausted by raiding. Shengzong himself returned to Yanjing some time after 8 February with little to show for his efforts.

The initial results of this tilt toward a more active strategy were not encouraging. Fu Qian attacked a Liao force at Peicun in southwest Yingzhou on 13 February in concert with an elite force from Gaoyangguan. Their coordination was poor, however, and when Fu withdrew, the elite force continued its attack. The Liao concentrated upon the elite troops, surrounding and killing them all. They then plundered two prefectures and withdrew.[21] This disappointing encounter would, however, soon be overtaken by a tremendous Song

victory.

Fan Tingzhao reported on 19 February that he had defeated a large Liao force ten miles east of Mozhou, beheading more than ten thousand men and capturing more weapons than could be successfully counted. He had defeated the main Liao army as it returned to Liao territory laden with plunder. The Liao soldiers were forced to abandon their prizes in order to escape, arriving home empty handed.[22] Particularly for an army that relied upon plunder to pay its troops, and a ruling class which relied upon the prestige of military success to maintain its power, this was a shattering defeat at the end of an otherwise unimpressive campaign. Despite this defeat, the Liao army did succeed in Shengzong's larger goals of putting pressure on the Song, and forestalling a Song invasion. The Liao army had wreaked immense damage upon Hebei and the border region, even without capturing any major cities. The campaign demonstrated that Hebei was vulnerable to raiding, and raised serious questions about the wisdom of continuing Song Taizong's strategy of passive defense. Shengzong had quite effectively raised the stakes in the conflict, even if his execution on the battlefield had been unimpressive. The particular power of the Liao strategy was that they did not have to win decisive victories every time in order to accomplish their goals.

Fan Tingzhao's victory allowed Zhenzong to return from the front on a successful note on 29 February. The Song emperor had demonstrated his own resolve, and learned that his army could be an effective force when properly led. The Liao invasion had also made it clear that a more aggressive defense strategy was needed. And if Zhenzong had been unable to decisively change that strategy during the invasion, he signaled that he had made that change afterward by replacing the previous military commanders at Dingzhou and Zhenzhou, and by exiling Fu Qian.[23] If Liao strategy had become more aggressive, Song strategy had become similarly aggressive.



28. Liao 1001 raid

The Liao campaign of 1001 (20 October –22 November 1001)

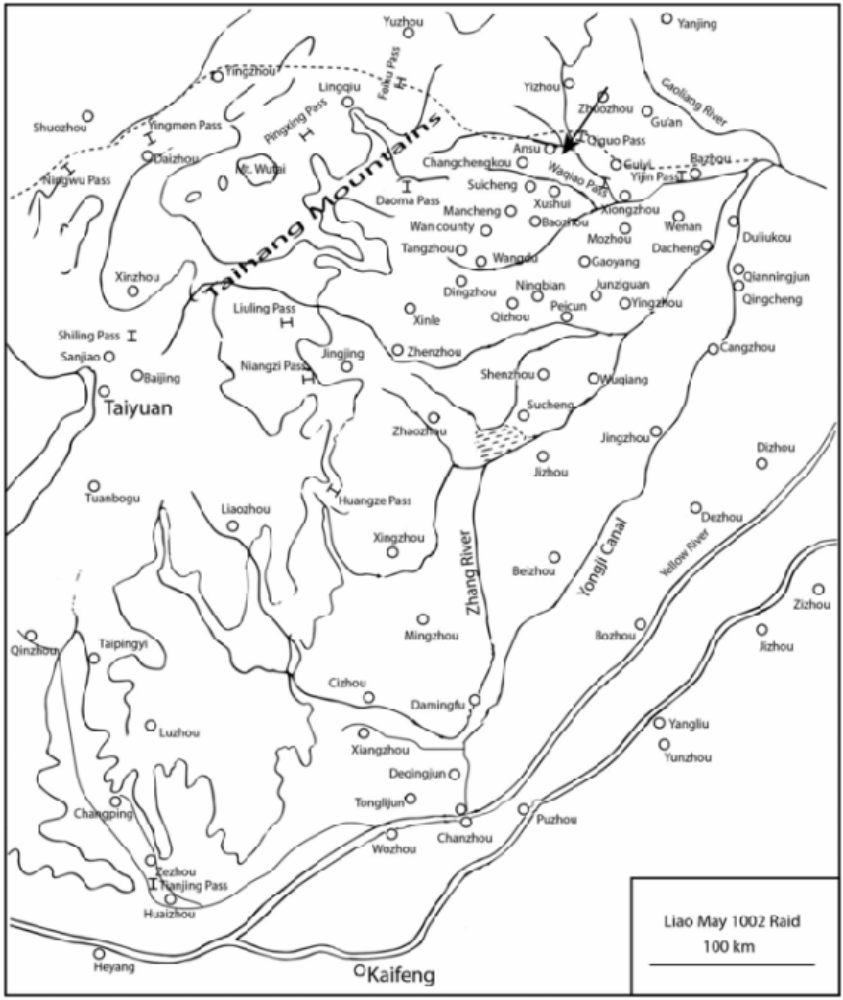
The inconclusive 999–1000 campaign resolved nothing between the two sides, and was very much an example of what was to come. Over the next few years, the Liao would repeatedly invade Song territory with similarly limited results. Neither side was able decisively to defeat the other as Liao strength in the field was counterbalanced by Song strength in fortification and defense. Beginning in 1000, Zhenzong sanctioned the completion of the hydraulic defense network to further improve Hebei's defenses.[24] In the autumn of 1001, Shengzong returned to the field again, hopeful, perhaps, that Song defenses in Hebei were weakened by their problems with the Xi Xia in the northwest. Just as before, the Liao army skirted Song defenses to the west, and attacked Suicheng. This time, however, the results were more lopsided, and the Liao army was badly defeated.

Shengzong opened his campaign on 20 October 1001, but returned after less than a month in the field, ostensibly because of the mud. As was frequently the case, the campaign began well, with the Liao army defeating a Song force outside Suicheng on 4 November.[25] But the city itself remained beyond the Liao emperor's grasp, and his army rode south. A clash at Changchengkou, on 9 November, during a heavy downpour went poorly for the Liao, as the rain loosened the Liao soldiers' bowstrings. Song troops under Zhang Bin took advantage of this to crush the Liao force, inflicting heavy casualties on it and taking many prisoners.[26]

Unlike the 999 campaign, however, the Song army responded to Shenzong's invasion with an active defense. Song forward defenses were bolstered by an additional twenty thousand cavalry in the Gaoyangguan circuit, and a further five brigades, each of three thousand cavalry, advanced beyond that. Ten thousand Song soldiers were added to Mozhou, special troops were positioned in Shun'an

prepared to attack, and a further ten thousand men were set to cut off the West Mountain route.[27] For a time, slow Liao progress called the wisdom of these dispositions into question; the Song army seemed to be overextended. Indeed, Liao Shengzong himself withdrew from the field after reaching Mancheng on 16 November, and ordered the Liao army to retreat. But the Song army's most forward units now attacked the Liao army as it tried to return home. Song forces under Wang Xian won a stunning victory near Suicheng on 22 November, killing more than twenty thousand Liao troops, and capturing fifteen important commanders, along with a vast number of warhorses. The remains of the routed Liao army fled back across the border.[28]

Shengzong's 1001 campaign was unquestionably a disaster for him, and for the Liao army. Even with the distractions of the Xi Xia in the northwest, the Song army in Hebei had been able to defeat a major Liao army in the field. The weather may have contributed significantly to the first battle the Liao lost, but it does not appear to have played a part in the major battle near Suicheng. There were two major weaknesses in the Liao strategy: first, they campaigned at about the same time every year, in the late fall, and, second, they used the same invasion route each time. Shengzong's losses in 1001 made it clear that a drastic change in strategy was needed if subsequent campaigns were to succeed.



29. Liao 1002 raid

The Liao campaign of 1002

The disastrous 1001 campaign temporarily diminished the Liao court's enthusiasm, if not interest, in invading Song territory. Given the Song's growing difficulties with Li Jiqian and the Xi Xia in the northwest, Liao Shengzong's limited military efforts in 1002 hint at the profound impact of the Liao army's losses the previous year. The Liao army itself had probably not completely recovered from the loss of so many commanders and frontline troops, and the Liao emperor himself was not interested in immediately returning to the field. It may also have been clear to the Liao court that they invited a repeat of their earlier defeat if they followed the same campaign strategy a second time. Early in 1002, Shengzong experimented with a new strategy of invading in the early spring, rather than the fall. This gave the Liao army strategic surprise, something it had lacked before, but limited the force that could be mobilized because the horses that the Liao army relied upon were weak after their winter foraging. After all, the reason the Liao army had lacked strategic surprise before was because the Liao emperor and his generals preferred to campaign when their horses, and thus their armies, were at their strongest, in the fall.

Unwilling to simply abandon the larger policy of maintaining military pressure on the Song, the Liao court launched a very limited campaign led by lower-ranking commanders early in 1002. It also seems that this was an attempt to strike before the Song extended its hydraulic defense line any further. The campaign against the Song began on 13 May, and was followed two days later by a victory over a Song force at Liangmen, and another victory at Taizhou on 23 May.[29] This closed out the Liao's very early season of raiding, making no impression whatsoever upon the Song court.

The Song continued to improve Hebei's defenses that year by extending the hydraulic defense system in the border region.[30] Efforts

were also made to organize and arm the population, and rewards were provided for Liao heads and horses.[31] At the same time, drought conditions, and the continuing problems in the northwest, forced Zhenzong to keep troops either in Hedong or farther back from the border, rather than in the forward positions which had allowed the Song to attack the Liao army so successfully in 1001. The inescapable problems of the "autumn defense," the expense of concentrating troops versus the possible weakness caused by dispersed armies, were an ongoing concern for Zhenzong.[32] Fortunately for the Song, the Liao were not prepared to take advantage of their diminished troop numbers and less aggressive dispositions.

Whether through good intelligence, or a well-reasoned guess, Zhenzong did not expect the Liao to attack in force in the fall or winter of 1002. So, when word came from the border on 9 December that the Liao were planning an incursion, Zhenzong was unperturbed. He guessed, correctly, that the Liao were not prepared to launch a serious invasion at that time. The Liao military machine was neither invincible nor unlimited in its resources; its half-hearted raid in May had probably done more to demonstrate its weakness, than to convince the Song of the potency of its threat. The Liao force had risked little and accomplished less. Even as a show of force, the 1002 effort was inadequate. But the 1002 campaign proved to be a pause before the war resumed in earnest the following year.

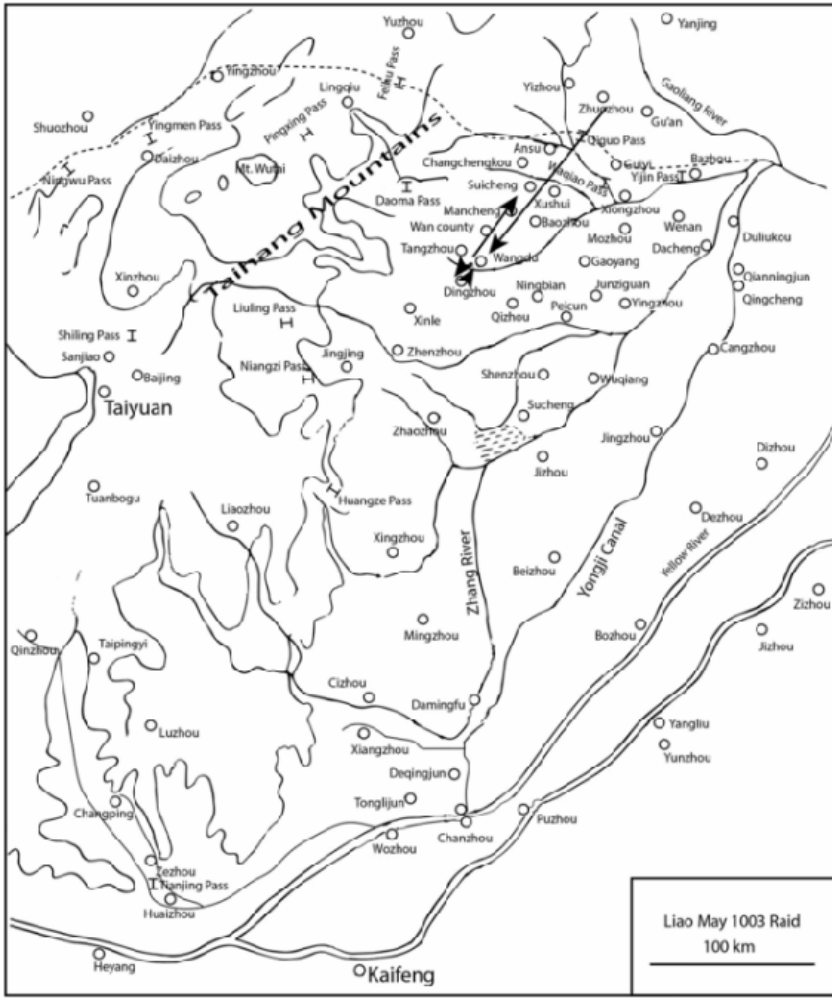
The Liao campaign of 1003

In 1003, the Liao introduced a further refinement of their spring–summer campaign strategy: concentrating all their forces on a single objective. The campaigns of 999–1000 and 1001 had demonstrated the dangers of invading via Suicheng, around the western end of the Song defense line, Liao weakness in siege warfare techniques, and the limited political usefulness of wide-ranging plundering raids which failed to capture significant towns, forts, or cities. The 1002 campaign re-emphasized some of those problems, and added the uselessness of weak, shallow incursions, but offered the hope that an "off-season" campaign might catch the Song unprepared. The Liao's strategy in their 1003 campaign, which culminated in the Battle of Wangdu, was therefore a logical development of their previous attempts to pressure the Song militarily. The tactical results were equivocal; although the Song lost the field and fled, they inflicted great casualties on the Liao, but the strategic results were more encouraging.

Shengzong and his court learned two important lessons from their campaigns. First, concentrated, deep-penetrating attacks were much more effective than wide-ranging but scattered raiding. Second, the Song army would respond vigorously to any invasion. It was also clear to the Liao court from a logistical standpoint that a large-scale invasion could not be mounted in the spring or summer. Not only were their own horses out of shape, but there would be very little food or forage on the Song side of the border outside of the fortified cities and towns.

Apart from these progressive developments in Liao strategy, the most important result of the 1003 campaign was the capture of Song general Wang Jizhong (?–1023). The importance of his capture for future events was not understood at the time (initially he was believed by the Song court to have been killed), but Wang would become the bridge between the Song and Liao courts which allowed, or at least

greatly facilitated, the peace negotiations during the 1004 campaign. Wang Jizhong was able to play that role because he was personally close to Zhenzong. Given the near total breakdown of communications between the two courts, and the deep mistrust that divided them, Wang's importance cannot be overemphasized. Wang was the necessary diplomatic conduit to complement the Liao's evolving strategy in their quest to resolve their border with the Song. The end result of the 1003 campaign was, quite unknown to the participants, the creation of sufficient conditions for real negotiations that would ultimately bring about a lasting peace. But I must emphasize that it was the combination of changing military circumstances and the inadvertent creation of a mutually credible political interlocutor that created these conditions.



30. Liao 1003 raid

In May of 1003, a Liao army tens of thousands of cavalry strong penetrated as far south as Wangdu county. The largest concentration of Song forces was at Dingzhou, and the commander there, Wang Chao, immediately responded to the incursion by leading a combined force of fifteen hundred cavalry and infantry to Wangdu. He also sent orders to Zhenzhou and Gaoyangguan to dispatch their own relief forces. Wang force-marched to Wangdu, only to find that the county seat had already fallen.[33] Exhausted, and having outrun his provisions and baggage train, Wang found himself fighting the Liao in the open field. While the advantage clearly lay with the Liao army, the Song

army performed extremely well, belying any characterization of weakness, cowardice, or incapacity in battle.

Overextended and exposed, Wang's immediate goal was to save as much of his army as possible. He had neither the men nor the supplies at his disposal to reasonably engage the Liao army, but the Liao forced the battle on him. The fighting was brutal as the Song army, fighting for its own survival, took a bloody toll on the Liao. Tian Min's unit took over two thousand Liao heads, and Zhang Min, wounded repeatedly, personally killed a Liao general in combat. The fighting continued the entire day, stopping only with night fall. When fighting resumed the next morning, the Liao concentrated their efforts on the eastern flank of the Song army, cutting off its communications. Trying to salvage his army, Wang ordered a retreat, and his units struggled to break contact. This was probably only possible because they had inflicted such heavy casualties on the Liao the previous day. It is also likely that Wang did not face the entire weight of the Liao invading force, reportedly tens of thousands of cavalry, but only a part of it. The Liao concentration on the east flank allowed the rest of the Song army to break contact and withdraw. Wang Jizhong disregarded Wang Chao's orders and led a squadron of light cavalry to attack the Liao. He and his squadron were cut off and nearly annihilated, with Wang Jizhong himself captured.[34]

The majority of Wang Chao's force managed to make an orderly withdrawal across the Tang River and return to Dingzhou, where the garrison had taken up position covering the bridges to the city in anticipation of Wang's return. This proved critical in Wang's force's safe return, as the Liao army had aggressively pursued the Song army on its retreat. Unable to cut off his route into the city and safety, the Liao broke off pursuit. Frustrated in their attempt to destroy a main Song force in the field, or to capture any strategic position, the Liao made scattered raids on other counties and commanderies. These subsequent attacks, on the area around Suicheng and Ansu commandery in particular, were also without much effect, and the

Liao army dispersed. The only Liao success was the destruction of Wangdu.[35]

For the Liao, the 1003 campaign demonstrated the value of attacking early, and the possibility of making a deep, penetrating attack bypassing the main Song defense line. They had also captured the Song's Wangdu commandery and driven Wang Chao's force from the field. The capture of Wang Jizhong and the destruction of his cavalry squadron were also extremely significant. Yet they had failed to capture any important city, or to destroy Wang Chao's force in the field. On the contrary, the Liao had sustained extremely heavy casualties in battle with the Song army, and were unable to prevent its orderly withdrawal from the battlefield. When we consider that Wang Chao's entire force was only fifteen hundred men, and that Tian Min's unit alone took over two thousand Liao heads, it is clear that the Song army inflicted far more casualties than it sustained. Indeed, judging from the subsequent investigation of the battle by the Song court, most of the Song officers survived the battle. So, while the Liao victory was not pyrrhic, it was hardly an impressive tactical or strategic performance.

The Song court had some difficulty drawing conclusions about their military situation from the Liao incursion. Once again, the early campaign made a fall or winter invasion unlikely, though the limited effects of the Liao incursion did not make the prospect of future early attacks particularly worrisome. Indeed, the Song army had performed extremely well on the whole, blunting the Liao invasion and effectively dealing with the threat. Wang Chao's performance was commendable. He rushed to rescue Wangdu, and finding that it had already fallen and that he faced a superior enemy force, withdrew. The Liao army was unable to sustain its attack for very long, even after overrunning Wangdu, and withdrew without doing much damage to the Song. It seemed as if Song defenses had strengthened markedly, and that the Liao army had lost much of its earlier force. Despite this, the strategic initiative remained with the Liao; the Liao

continued to decide when to launch offensives and the Song continued to react, albeit with some flexibility, actively or passively, to those actions. Zhenzong and his court could thus see the 1003 invasion as a sign that, while the Liao remained a serious threat, the severity of that threat was diminishing due to improved defenses.

The Liao's 1003 invasion set the political and military stage for the dramatic events of late 1004 and early 1005. Politically, the two courts had each moved to an understanding of the situation that would prove critical for the 1005 peace agreement. The Liao court saw that the Song's strengthening defenses were diminishing its ability to pressure the Song militarily for its political goals. Small raids were less and less effective, and larger ones were still extremely risky. Only a concentrated, all-out offensive could overwhelm the Song's defenses and pose the kind of military threat that would lead to negotiations. This was, of course, risky, since such an effort could also fail spectacularly. But the Liao court saw the opportunity to reach its goals disappearing.

The Song court had shifted its position far more than the Liao by the end of 1003. Under Taizong, the conquest of the Sixteen Prefectures was still the official policy despite two failed campaigns to take the area from the Liao. Even though the Song army had functionally shifted to a defensive stance in Hebei, the emperor's refusal openly to countenance an acknowledgement that his own military failures had made the conquest of the Sixteen Prefectures impracticable made a political settlement with the Liao along the lines of the existing territorial borders impossible. That changed when Zhenzong began to see the problem of Liao invasions as a military, rather than a political, problem. A political solution to a chronic military problem was acceptable where a political solution to a political problem was not. This change of position was only possible because of Taizong's failures to solve his own political or military problems with military means. The political positions of both courts in 1004 were the reasons the massive Liao invasion of 1004 was

concluded with a stable peace agreement.

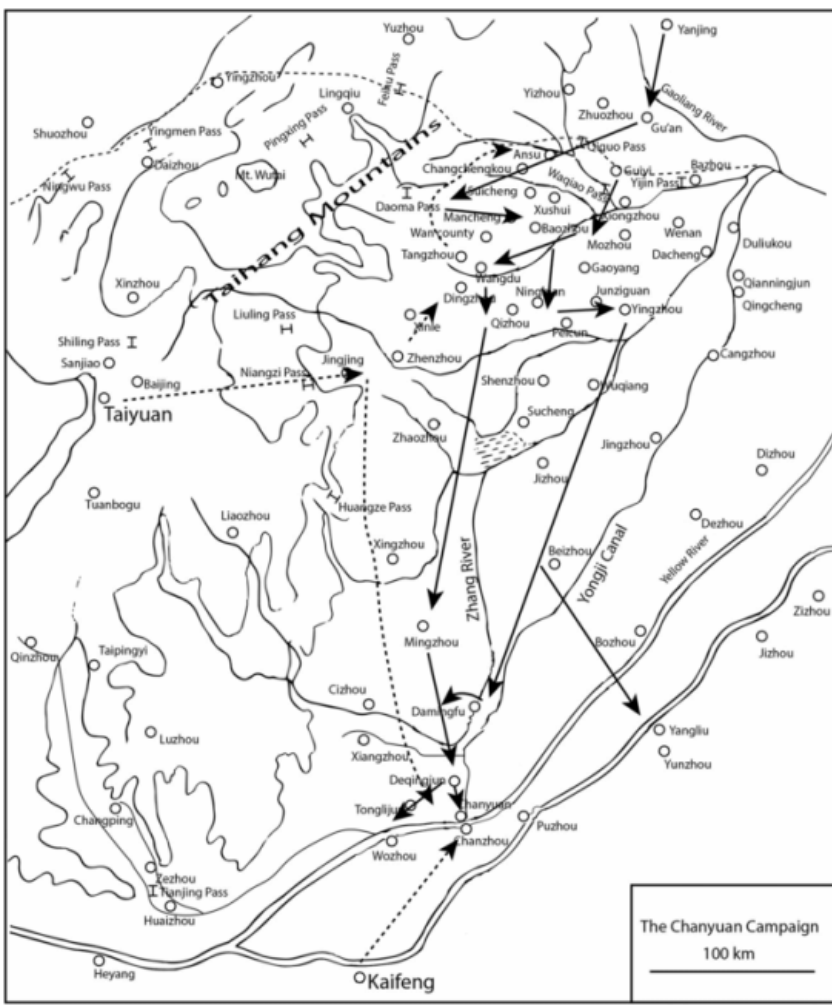
The military position of both empires in 1004 was only slightly less important than the respective courts' political dispositions to the 1005 peace agreement. It is worth stressing again that the Liao army's experience campaigning against the Song did not lead the Liao court to regard the Song army as weak, or an easy opponent. On the contrary, the Liao court understood that the greatest obstacle to the achievement of their political goals was the strength of the Song army. Although the Liao had won many battles against the Song, they had lost just as many, and on several occasions, taken disproportionately great casualties. Of even greater concern in 1004, the Song defenses in Hebei continued to improve. There was therefore great urgency for a political resolution of their relationship with the Song while the Liao army remained a serious military threat.

The Xi Xia threat in the northwest and the Liao threat in the northeast placed great strain upon the Song army, both in terms of personnel and money. Thousands of Song troops marched east from the Xi Xia front for the annual "autumn defense" against the Liao. Much of the impetus for building the hydraulic defense system was to alleviate the immense logistical burden that supplying the army on the Liao front created. Facing two opponents, the Song army was unable to concentrate on either one. But Li Jiqian's death in January of 1004 temporarily ended the Xi Xia threat and opened up the possibility of a concentrated military response to the Liao.[36] This may well have been a crucial prerequisite for Zhenzong in considering whether or not to confront personally the Liao army in 1004. Quite apart from that, after years of intense warfare that, despite the respectable performance of the Song army, failed to resolve either border problem, the Song court could clearly see the limits of military action. At the same time, the strength of the Song army allowed the court to consider negotiations since those negotiations would not be from a position of weakness. Had the Song army been truly weak vis-à-vis the Liao army in 1004, the negotiations that ended the Song–Liao conflict

would have been politically impossible for Zhenzong. Taizong, after all, had been unable to negotiate with the Liao precisely because he was militarily weak.

The Chanyuan campaign (24 September 1004–21 January 1005)[37]

On 24 September 1004, Shengzong announced that he would campaign against the Song. His edict came as no surprise to the Song court. Liao light cavalry had been reconnoitering Song territory from at least 25 August.[38] Song border officials reported on 9 September that the Liao were planning to invade.[39] Shengzong arrived in Yanzhou on 11 October to prepare for the invasion.[40] Dowager Empress Xiao once again accompanied Shengzong.



The Song prepared for the Liao invasion by reinforcing their border cities, particularly Dingzhou, and giving additional gifts of money to the soldiers. Since the Liao were planning to invade and the Song had a large number of troops in Hebei, on 2 October, Zhenzong asked his officials if he should personally go to the front. It seemed to Zhenzong that he had an opportunity to achieve a decisive victory over the Liao that would settle the border. His officials were not enthusiastic, but they recognized that, at least for the moment, Zhenzong had already decided to go. Instead of fruitlessly opposing the emperor's expedition, they tried to limit its range and delay its beginning. Bi Shi'an felt that Zhenzong should rely upon the generals that were already in the field to handle the Liao. If the emperor was going to the front, he should not go any farther north than Chanyuan (modern Puyang). Even then, particularly with the approach of winter, Chanyuan was not a suitable place for a large army to remain for a long time. An imperial expedition would require careful planning. Other officials echoed these concerns, proposing that Zhenzong go no farther than Chanyuan. Zhenzong apparently agreed with Bi Shi'an and the other officials. He would go to Chanyuan after careful preparation.[41] The preparations took three months, and Zhenzong had second thoughts about going, but he did go.

The Liao invasion followed the same route that almost all previous invasions had, opening with an attack on the approaches to Dingzhou. The Liao army badly beat a Song force at Tangxing, north of Dingzhou, on 31 October. The following day a Liao force under Xiao Talin defeated a Song army at Suicheng, northeast of Dingzhou. With the Song army temporarily driven from the field, the Liao army camped at Wangdu on 4 November.[42] In response to the initial Liao advance, on 5 November, Wang Chao led a large army to the Shuying Palisade on the Tang River to bolster the approaches to Dingzhou.[43] A Liao force was badly defeated two days later.[44] Zhenzong was having second thoughts about going to the front, with his doubts fed by some

of his closest advisors. It fell to Kou Zhun, the Chief Councilor of State, to stiffen the resolve Zhenzong held only a month earlier.

Although Kou Zhun had already convinced Zhenzong to go to the front, the Liao invasion was so threatening that on 7 November, Wang Qinruo, Participant in Determining Governmental Matters, secretly proposed that Zhenzong flee to Jinling (Nanjing) and Chen Yaosou, Notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs, proposed that Zhenzong flee to Chengdu (in Sichuan). This set the stage for a well-known display of patriotism by Kou Zhun. Zhenzong called Kou Zhun in to discuss the idea of fleeing to Jinling or Chengdu. When Kou arrived, Wang Qinruo and Chen Yaosou were already present:

> Kou Zhun realized that Wang Qinruo had asked the emperor to visit the South because he was from Jiangnan and that Chen Yaosou had asked the emperor to visit the West because he was from Sichuan. Kou pretended that he didn't know [who had proposed fleeing] and said: 'Those who devised such plans for Your Majesty should be condemned and beheaded. The reigning Son of Heaven has divine military qualities and the officers and commanders are united and in harmony. If the Imperial Chariot sets out for a campaign under the personal supervision of the emperor they (the Liao) would surely vanish. If not, issue a clever stratagem in order to destroy their schemes, safely guard [our territory] and exhaust their people. If they become tired of their endeavors, we can expect victory. How could we wish to abandon our ancestral temples and our altars to the spirit of the land and go as far away as Chu (the South) or Shu (Sichuan)?' Thereupon the emperor desisted [from those plans].[45]

The Liao simultaneously attacked Weilujun, Shun'anjun, Beiping Fort, and Baozhou on 9 November. All four attacks failed, although the Liao defeated Beiping Fort's troops in battle. Xiao Talin, whose forces had attacked Weilujun and Shun'anjun, then linked up with Shengzong and the Dowager Empress to attack Dingzhou. The Song army took up a defensive position behind the Tang River, limiting their attacks to trying to drive off Liao reconnaissance cavalry. It was at this time, according to the Song sources, that Wang Jizhong sent a letter on behalf of the Liao to Shi Pu at Mozhou to discuss peace.[46] Several days later, on 13 November, the Liao launched a diversionary attack on Kelanjun, more than two hundred kilometers to the west, on the far

side of the Taihang Mountains. The attack was beaten off but it accomplished its purpose.[47] Just like the other unsuccessful assaults on Song positions, the attack on Kelanjun put the Song on the defensive. With the Song army maintaining a static defense in the various cities and forts, the initiative was now firmly in Liao hands.

Having taken the measure of the Song forward defense system around Dingzhou, the Liao circumvented it. Liao forces crossed the Tang River east of Dingzhou. Rather than turning back to the west and attacking Dingzhou, a Liao army marched east and south, attacking Yingzhou at dusk on 20 November. Shengzong and his mother personally directed at least part of the attack on Yingzhou. The assault continued for more than ten days. Song casualties were heavy, thirty thousand dead and twice as many wounded, but the city held out.[48] The attack on Yingzhou destroyed the city's military strength. Although the Liao lifted their siege, they continued to occupy the surrounding territory and make scattered attacks on Song positions. The Song army for its part continued to raid Liao positions.

After the failed assault on Yingzhou, the Liao paused for several weeks. There are three likely reasons for their pause. First, Shengzong and his mother were waiting for the Song reaction to their peace overture in light of their attacks on Yingzhou and other raiding. Second, while they were waiting for the Song to make them an offer, they were reorganizing, refitting, and resting their troops. Their forces had been campaigning fairly intensely throughout November. If they were going to continue into southern Hebei, the troops needed to be put back in order, and probably resupplied with arrows, before they faced the Song army again. Thirdly, they were bringing up fresh units now that they had a foothold in Song territory. All of the attacks on positions in northern Hebei had been carried out by relatively small, dispersed units. It is only in mid-December that we first get any sort of troop numbers for the Liao army in Hebei. The purpose of the early raids was to either draw Song troops out so that they could be destroyed in detail or to scare them into shutting themselves up

behind their walls. The attack on Yingzhou ended the first stage of the Liao campaign. Since their military threat was not sufficiently frightening to convince Zhenzong to come to terms, they went on to the second stage. On 19 December, a report reached the Song court that the Liao planned to ride south from Yingzhou with two hundred thousand troops through the gap between Beizhou, Jizhou, and Tianxiongjun.[49]

Zhenzong ordered the commander of Deqingjun on 21 December to lead all of his troops to Chanyuan if the Liao rode south.[50] The Song continued to build up troops and defensive positions in Chanyuan. The Song government also continued to distribute extensive gifts of money, silk, and wine to the soldiers and people of Hebei. The Song court was keenly aware that the Liao were actively scouting Song defenses in preparation for an advance by the main army.

Diplomatic activity also picked up, and Shengzong received a report on 31 December that the Song had sent Wang Jizhong bows and arrows, secretly asking him to seek peace.[51] Even while he was purportedly putting out peace feelers, Zhenzong continued his military preparations, leaving Kaifeng on 3 January, riding toward Chanyuan.[52] This was not so much a rational strategy of looking for a solution to the hostilities while preparing for the worst, as a measure of Zhenzong indecision. Even as Zhenzong was on the road to Chanyuan, he once again reconsidered personally facing the Liao. He called on Kou Zhun again, just as he had before, to discuss the idea that he go to Jinling in the south. A no doubt exasperated Kou replied:

> Your advisors are cowardly and timid. They talk ignorantly, no different than farmers and old women. The invaders are now nearby and danger surrounds us. Your Majesty can advance a foot but cannot retreat an inch. All the armies in Hebei await your arrival day and night. The soldiers are very anxious. If you return a few paces then the multitude's spirit will collapse. The enemy will take advantage of that and Jinling won't be safe either.[53]

Zhenzong still could not make up his mind. Kou went out and ran into

Gao Qiong, the Commander in Chief of the Palace Corps. Kou said to him: “You have been generously rewarded by the country. Will you requite it now?” Gao replied: “I am a military man. I am sincerely willing to die for it.” Kou brought Gao into Zhenzong’s presence, where the general supported Kou’s advice. Gao pointed out that everyone’s families were still in the capital. He also thought that Zhenzong’s presence would increase the soldiers’ spirits and make defeating the Liao easy. Wang Yingchang also supported Kou, finally convincing Zhenzong to continue forward.[54] When Zhenzong reached Chanyuan on 5 January, he ordered corvée laborers to go up and down the Yellow River breaking the ice to prevent the Liao from crossing it.

The Liao captured Deqingjun on 7 January. Xiao Talin led an attack on Song positions just north of Chanyuan the same day.[55] Gao Qiong and Li Jilong brought up their forces and surrounded Xiao’s army on three sides. A sudden attack on the Liao by Song light cavalry drove the Liao to attack the arrayed Song army. Unable to make any impression on the Song troops, Xiao decided to withdraw. As Xiao led his vanguard away from the battlefield, concealed Song troops opened fire on him with crossbows and siege crossbows. Xiao was struck in the forehead by a bolt and died that night.[56]

At the same time that Zhenzong was approaching Chanyuan, Song–Liao negotiations were beginning in earnest. Zhenzong was in favor of peace, but he was not certain that the Liao were trustworthy. They had already deeply invaded Song territory. Of even more immediate concern was the freezing of the Yellow River. The Liao army had already demonstrated that it could not be contained by dispersed static defense positions. Without the barrier of the Yellow River, Kaifeng itself was threatened and Zhenzong could be cut off. Zhenzong expressed his resolve to have a single, decisive battle to annihilate the Liao invaders.

The Liao captured Tonglijun on 8 January. Zhenzong arrived in the southern city of Chanyuan on 9 January. He was reluctant to cross

the Yellow River to the north city of Chanyuan. Kou Zhun pleaded with Zhenzong to go to the north city. He warned the emperor that morale would be destroyed if he did not cross the river. Gao Qiong again supported Kou. When Feng Zheng, Notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs, snorted in derision after Gao spoke, Gao angrily rebuked him: “You have established yourself through literary achievement. Now, when enemy cavalry is all around us you disparage me without respect. Why don’t you compose a poem and by reading it cause the enemy cavalry to retreat?” Zhenzong then agreed to continue on to the north city. But when he reached the pontoon bridge to cross the river, he stopped again. Gao Qiong beat on the palanquin bearers and hectored them until Zhenzong agreed to cross the river. When he reached the north city, the emperor ascended to the top of the city gate. The imperial yellow dragon banners were unfurled and all of the soldiers cheered.[57]

With the reluctant Zhenzong finally installed in the north city of Chanyuan, Cao Liyong went to the Liao court to discuss peace on 10 January. The Liao court sent Han Qi to the Song court to negotiate the settlement terms on 13 January. The Liao initially offered peace in exchange for the Guannan area.[58] Zhenzong decided to reject a land-for-peace deal. Part of his reasoning, that the Song had controlled the Guannan area for a long time, could have been used equally well by the Liao regarding the Sixteen Prefectures. Instead of land, the Song court offered to make an annual payment of money and silk.

States and even individual rulers are usually reluctant to concede land to an opponent unless they gain something in return. In the case of the Song, it seems that land was closely tied to issues of legitimacy and proof of possession of the Mandate of Heaven. Both the Song and Liao had geostrategic reasons for wanting to control the Guannan Region, but the Song had a symbolic reason as well. Loss of land was clearly, as subsequent negotiations showed, worse than sending annual payments that could easily be seen as tribute from an inferior. Shi Jingtang ceded the Sixteen Prefectures to the Liao as the act of a

subordinate ruler. Ceding land must therefore have been seen as the ultimate act of subservience and something that could not be characterized in any other way. Giving up land that one's opponent had not conquered himself was a sign that you did not think you would survive rejecting such a demand. Yielding the Guannan Region to the Liao was therefore politically unsustainable for any Song emperor.

It is difficult to parse the respective bargaining positions from the two courts' strategic interests. I shall return to this issue later on, but Zhenzong had good reason from either perspective for rejecting the Liao offer. His rejection also indicates that, while the Liao had a superior bargaining position, Zhenzong did not believe the Liao were dramatically stronger than the Song. Indeed, the Liao request for land perhaps inadvertently revealed that they did not believe they could seize the land by force. Since they had tried and failed repeatedly to capture the Guannan region, the initial Liao bargaining position may actually have strengthened the Song court's resolve. No record exists of either courts' deliberations on the matter.

Cao Liyong returned to the Liao court on 16 January. He rejected any cession of land but offered an annual payment of one hundred thousand taels of silver and two hundred thousand bolts of silk instead. Shengzong and his mother accepted the annual payment instead of the territory on 21 January.[59] The Liao campaign was successful. All of the raids and attacks culminated not in a decisive battle, but in a decisive negotiation. Although they could not know it at the time, their efforts resulted in over a century of peace between the Song and Liao.

The Chanyuan Covenant

The conclusion of the Chanyuan Covenant was one of the most important military, political, and cultural events of the eleventh century. As I noted in Chapter 2, a number of extremely significant military events in Song history have been ignored based on the assumption that wars, the military, and martial culture were not important during the Song dynasty. At a minimum, the very fact that Zhenzong and many of his court actually went to the front to face the Liao at some danger to themselves makes it unlikely that this was an insignificant event in their lives. A far more important legacy of the Chanyuan Covenant was that it laid the foundation for much of eleventh century Song culture. Given that the Song reached a certain cultural maturity in the eleventh century, and that the products of that culture redounded throughout not only the rest of Song history, but also the rest of Chinese history, it is worth examining the agreement and its ramifications in some detail.

I will begin by examining the Chanyuan Covenant itself, and how we might understand it from a military and strategic perspective. I will then discuss the scholarship, particularly recent work, on the issue, before concluding with a brief description of the broader, longer-term effects of the agreement. What is curious about the modern scholarship on the agreement is that it in many ways mirrors the Song reaction to it. The strongest reactions come from those seeing it in emotional and cultural terms, and who struggle to contextualize the terms historically. More subdued reactions come from the military and political perspective, or those dealing only with narrow historical questions.

Apart from the annual payments mentioned earlier, there were several other provisions of the treaty:

1. A clearly marked border between the two sides.

2. Enforcement of a peaceful border.

3. Extradition of criminals.

4. A ban on new fortifications or canals along the border. Old fortifications could be repaired.

Both sides solemnly swore to observe the treaty, invoking religious sanctions for failure to do so.[60]

The Chanyuan Covenant has been described as "…a great success of political realism over ideological pretensions."[61] The annual payments have been called "blackmail."[62] "Humiliating" is one of the most frequent words used in discussing the treaty. These views may accurately describe some of the Song views of the covenant, particularly later in the eleventh century and after, but what about the Liao perspective? The Liao started the war and retained the initiative throughout the fighting and the negotiations. The Song understanding, or misunderstanding, of Liao intentions certainly shaped the treaty. The Song were reacting during the negotiations. What did the Liao want? Was the Chanyuan Covenant a success for the Liao?

Shengzong and his mother invaded Song territory in 1004 in order to force Zhenzong to accept Liao sovereignty over the Sixteen Prefectures. At least with respect to that particular issue, they were successful. All of the Song primary sources documenting the campaign make it clear that the Liao asked for peace talks before the Song. The *Liaoshi* only records Song requests for peace talks. Who asked for peace talks first tells us nothing when it is taken out of the context of the goal of the military action. The Liao probably tried to open peace negotiations before the Song. Their aim was decisive negotiations, not a decisive battle. It was therefore to their advantage to begin negotiating while their army was in the field winning battles. More than eight centuries later, Clausewitz might write that "War was merely the continuation of policies by other means," but he assumed that campaigns led up to decisive battles.[63] The greatest weakness of that assumption is that battles are rarely decisive.[64] One of the

reasons that even a large battle involving tens of thousands of troops on both sides is not decisive is that the victor usually suffers as much if not more than the loser. Badly injured, the victor is in no condition to exploit his victory. His ability to threaten the loser with further destruction is compromised.

Even if the Liao had fought and won a decisive battle at Chanyuan, they would have still been deep in hostile territory, in the middle of winter, without a reliable source of supplies. They would have suffered many casualties in the battle and might have had to retreat at the height of their victory. By negotiating when they did, the Liao were able credibly to threaten further destruction or even a decisive battle. Zhenzong and most of his advisors were inclined to imagine that dire consequences would result from continued fighting. The theoretical consequences of fighting were balanced by certain concessions that Zhenzong felt he could not make. He could not cede new land to the Liao and he could not accept an inferior position to the Liao emperor. But implicit in these requirements was acceptance of Liao sovereignty over the Sixteen Prefectures. To Zhenzong, it was a question of how much more he would have to give up in order to get peace.[65] The Liao clearly understood this and began negotiations by demanding cession of the Guannan region, something they knew would be rejected. Demanding land for peace served two purposes: frightening the Song by manifesting their worst fears, and giving them something that they could save face with by rejecting. Cao Liyong was a hero for rejecting the Liao demand for land and substituting annual payments that would not be called tribute.[66]

The Chanyuan campaign and its resolution make no sense without understanding why Shengzong and his mother invaded the Song. They were not trying to destroy the Song. Their aims were very limited. They seized and maintained a dominant bargaining position by convincing the Song court that their aims were unlimited and that they were both willing and able to destroy the Song state. The argument at the Song court was not whether the Liao wanted to

destroy the Song state, but whether they were capable of doing so. The view that the Liao wanted to destroy the Song state persisted in the Song court until the Jin destroyed the Liao. When combined with a lack of faith in the effectiveness of the Song army, an opinion that the events of 1004–5 helped create, this view of the Liao kept the Song from breaking the treaty until the Jin were already destroying the Liao. Thus, for the next century, the Song court weighed the desire to conquer the Sixteen Prefectures, end the annual payments, and reject the Liao ruler as an emperor, against their belief that the Song army was weak, the Liao army strong, and that a failed attack on the Liao could result in the destruction of the Song state. They were unwilling to risk the destruction of the state. It was only the rise of the Jin that made the Liao army seem less strong and removed the possibility of the Liao destroying the Song state. Unfortunately, the Jin proved quite capable of capturing Kaifeng along with emperor Qinzong and the retired emperor Huizong.

The Chanyuan Covenant proved long lasting not just because the Song reluctantly accepted it, but also because the Liao accepted it. If the Liao really were far stronger than the Song, genuinely wanted to conquer China, and deeply resented the loss of the Guannan area to Zhou Shizong, why did they accept the treaty? The Liao army may have suffered a sharp decline in effectiveness during the eleventh century.[67] Whether the decline was real or only apparent, the Liao army was superior to the Song army only in the open field and even then only occasionally. And, while the idea of destroying the Song state may have occurred to some members of the Liao court, the Liao army was never capable of the task.[68] Likewise, the Guannan area may have been important to some at the Liao court, but it would have been an exposed salient in Song territory. Unlike the Sixteen Prefectures, which were protected by mountains, the Guannan area was, as its name describes, south of the passes. It was, however, extremely useful in negotiations. Not only could the Guannan area be painlessly given up, as it was in 1005, but it could also be the

gravamen of any future complaint. The Liao thus retained a useful claim on Song territory as a permanent *casus belli*. During the Song–Xi Xia war in the early 1040s, it was precisely this claim that forced the Song to increase its annual payments to the Liao in order to keep them out of the war.[69] From the Liao point of view, their relations with the Song under the treaty were close to ideal.

It would be overstating the case, however, to argue that the Guannan region was merely a bargaining chip for the Liao. What I have argued here is that it became a useful bargaining chip because there were many practical reasons for the Liao to use it as such. Without good evidence of the Liao court's deliberations and thought processes, we can only test their actions against the outcome. It may well be that what I have suggested were maximalist Liao demands for bargaining purposes were, in fact, their actual goals. If this was the case, then their willingness to give up those goals was a loss of uncertain (to us) importance. They may have inadvertently or unwillingly made concessions that created an extremely stable agreement.

As far as we know, there was no obvious political fallout on the Liao side because of the Chanyuan Covenant. If no one lost their position because of the outcome of the negotiations, then it is likely that the agreement was consonant not only with the strategic goals of the war, but also the political interests of the leadership in the Liao court. On the Song side, the initial relief at ending the war soon led to second thoughts, political recriminations, and eventually the sacking of Kou Zhun, the perceived driving force of the agreement. It is equally true that Kou Zhun's opponents had compelling political reasons to attack and criticize the agreement since its success gave Kou immense political capital. Nothing similar to this happened at the Liao court. The agreement must have accorded with the Dowager Empress and the emperor's wishes.

The Liao did not possess the Guannan region when the negotiations took place. This suggests two important considerations

for the negotiations and the stability of the agreement. First, since no territory was exchanged, territory was a far more charged issue than silver, silk, or even the ritual concessions that were made. Ceding territory was simply a step too far for the Song court. Second, possibly connected to the previous point, the military significance of the territory the Song held made it impossible to give it up. In simple strategic terms, controlling the north–south routes from the Sixteen Prefectures into the Guannan, and then Hebei regions, was critical for the Song. Song control over the passes in Guannan was a vital defensive advantage. The Liao were forced either to bypass these strongpoints, taking less good routes and leaving hostile positions in their rear, or to attack them directly. Direct attacks on Song cities and fortified towns had proven extremely costly and only occasionally effective. As long as the Song held Guannan, the Liao had very few good offensive choices, and even had to be concerned with their own defenses.

The territorial results of the Chanyuan Covenant, based directly upon the territorial status quo at the time of the agreement, can be seen as the concrete manifestation of the psychological and military balance of power between the Song and Liao courts. Perhaps by accident, the interlocutors for the respective courts produced a remarkably stable agreement that satisfied, at least initially, both sides. The stability of the agreement was based upon some objective geostrategic realities and the mentalities of both courts. Despite continuous hostility to the agreement in the subsequent century at the Song court, the Chanyuan Covenant embedded itself in Song political culture as a chronic irritant that could not be removed. Unfortunately, we have no information on the covenant's place in Liao political culture. Nevertheless, for over a century, the Chanyuan Covenant became a diplomatic, military, and political fact of life for both courts.

The afterlife of the Chanyuan Covenant extended well beyond the Song dynasty. A number of important studies of the agreement in the latter half of the twentieth century were further augmented by a new

round of research in the twenty-first century, some of it stimulated by the thousanth anniversary of the agreement. In 2005, there were several papers given in Calgary at the Chinese Military History Society's annual meeting, including a reconsideration by Christian Schwarz-Schilling of the issue he had studied in 1959.[70] Hoyt Tillman published his own survey of the scholarship in a Korean journal.[71] Also in 2005, David Wright published his important book on Song diplomatic history, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China*.[72] My book covering a much broader timeframe but with some comments on the agreement also came out in 2005.[73]

There is little in dispute over the specific terms of the agreement; the tensions in the secondary materials involve the broader significance of the agreement's terms. The earlier generation of scholars, Tao Jingshen, Frederic Mote, Wang Gungwu, Morris Rossabi, focused on the contrast between the Song court's concessions and accommodations, and Fairbanks' model of hierarchical Chinese tributary relations where China stood atop a graded system of unequal states. Fairbanks' model was itself a reflection of the western powers' reaction to the difficulty of dealing with the Manchu Qing court. The western powers believed that they had dragged an arrogant, self-centered, myopic imperial Chinese court into the enlightened, modern world of diplomacy, where sovereign states treated each other as equals. By contrast, and in spite of their preferred mode of relations with foreign states, the Song court had made an equal treaty with the Liao empire. This view of the Qing dynasty's relations with the West was prevalent in Chinese scholarship as well, where many modern Chinese blamed the Manchu Qing court for China's failure to fend off the imperialist West and to modernize as Japan had.

It was important for these scholars to determine whether or not the Chanyuan Covenant was a "disgrace" or "humiliation" forced upon the Song court by the militarily superior Liao. As I mentioned earlier, officials at Zhenzong's court attacked the covenant for political reasons, but its provisions, coming on the heels of an indecisive

military confrontation, made it an easy target. Later Song statesmen also regarded the covenant as a disgrace without any of the earlier political considerations, though perhaps with different political considerations for their own time, an issue I discussed in Chapter 2. It was possible to argue that the Song had pragmatically chosen peace at the cost of relatively small annual payments to the Liao and some ritual concessions, or that a tradeoff was made between an almost unpalatable peace and increasing militarization of the Song court. The Chanyuan Covenant got wrapped up into the larger discussions of fundamental Song weakness, the rise of the literati class, a flourishing civil rather than military culture, and general Song stability. At best, as these scholars saw it, the Song court chose a bad peace over a worse war as part of a self-conscious civil cultural bias. At worst, they were forced into a despicable treaty by abject defeat.

Another reason for the intensely emotional characterizations of the Chanyuan Covenant was the focus on diplomacy. The military aspects of the conflict were simplified, erroneously as we have seen in this chapter, into an overwhelming Liao military force confronting a weak Song army. Diplomacy, like war, also has a tendency in outside evaluations to be cast into stark black or white terms. Victories are glorious and absolute; defeats are ignominious and crushing. When evaluating a diplomatic resolution to a conflict, it is not enough to determine whether the interlocutors obtained satisfactory outcomes from their own perspectives. At some abstract level of analysis, we must examine the reasoning that led to that satisfactory or unsatisfactory outcome to determine if the respective sides were right in their own estimates. A further step requires us to look at the subsequent results of an agreement and to see if the agreement really worked out well for any of the participants. From the long-term perspective, the Chanyuan Covenant was probably good for both sides on many levels, yet Song statesmen continued to dislike it.

The later generation of historians were less concerned to place the agreement in the context of China's "century of humiliation," the

period starting at the Opium War (1839–42). Partly of course, this was because this had already been done. It was also clear that rendering a judgment on whether or not the Chanyuan Covenant was "humiliating" or pragmatic has very little to do with historical research. We can say that Song statesmen characterized the agreement in those terms, or that later Chinese historians described them in that way, but there is no objective measure of shame or pragmatism. Likewise, the question of which side initiated the peace talks cannot be determined based upon our currently available source, and, as I discussed in this chapter, from a strategic perspective the issue is not even particularly important. It is interesting that some people have an emotional attachment to the question of who was first to ask for peace talks, but it has no strategic significance.

The role of Wang Jizhong has been much debated for reasons similar to the instigator of peace talks issue. David Wright has with good reason utterly rejected the importance of Wang.[74] To focus on the role of that individual is to overlook the larger strategic picture. Wang was at best helpful in facilitating the talks; they were so significant, however, that they would have taken place without him. Both sides had carefully weighed their options and their risks. The actual negotiations proceeded quickly because their respective positions were not far apart. Had their positions been largely incompatible, it is likely that fighting would have continued; that is why Zhenzong and Kou Zhun were pleased with the agreement.

A final issue with the Chanyuan Covenant is the overlooked uncertainty concerning how long any of the interlocutors imagined the agreement would last. We know it lasted for over a century, but the respective sides did not know that it would. Indeed, I would argue that, given their knowledge of Chinese history, none of the people on either side had any reason to believe that the agreement would last for more than a few years. They would have been hard-pressed to find good historical models of stable long-term treaties. Rather than concluding a long-term agreement that would last for decades, the

courts likely saw the compact as temporary. Very few diplomatic agreements in world history have been as stable as the Chanyuan Covenant, so we may forgive the negotiators for not understanding fully the implications of what they had accomplished. Hence, this pivotal military, diplomatic, political, and cultural artifact of the eleventh century, while not an accident, far exceeded the scope of its creators' imagination.

War by other means

Zhenzong and his court initially saw the Chanyuan Covenant as a diplomatic victory for the Song. Once the immediate crisis was over, however, it was increasingly regarded as a humiliating failure. By late 1007, Zhenzong was looking for a way to overcome the shame of the treaty. Since military action was out of the question, Zhenzong settled on the idea of performing the Feng and Shan sacrifices, a massive ritual display of imperial legitimacy. The appropriate auspicious omens were produced and the sacrifices took place in 1008. Zhenzong also sacrificed to the earth at Fenyin in 1011, a sacrifice second in status only to the Feng and Shan sacrifices.

Both Sima Guang and the editors of the *Songshi* explained the sacrifices as directed at the Liao. The Liao were allegedly a superstitious people who would be impressed by auspicious omens.[75] Impressive displays of wealth and culture were not limited to the Song. The Liao erected a variety of dramatic Buddhist monasteries. These examples only hint at the ways that both the Song and Liao fought to assert their legitimacy and cultural superiority through non-military means. After the Chanyuan Covenant, those were the only means they used for more than a century.

[1] My translation of Kou Zhun's audience with Zhenzong is closely based on Wolfgang Franke's in "Historical Precedent of Accidental Repetition of Events? K'ou Chun in 1004 and Yu Ch'ien in 1449," in *Études Song in Memoriam Étienne Balazs*, Françoise Aubin ed., Series 1, Fascicle 3, 199–206.

[2] XCB 41.862.

[3] Lau Nap-Yin Lau, "Song-Liao Chanyuan zhi Meng Xintan," The Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taibei, Taiwan, vol. 61/3, (1990), 693–760.

[4] The history of the Tangut Xia which follows is drawn from F.W. Mote, Imperial China, 900–1800, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 171–9; Dai Xizhang, Xi Xia Ji, Ningxia: Renmin chubanshe, 1988, pp. 32–93.

[5] In this respect, I disagree with Professor Mote's assertion that the Liao only began to be suspicious of Li Jiqian in 997. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800*, p. 178.

[6] For a more detailed account of the Song hydraulic defense system, see Peter Lorge, "The Great Ditch of China and the Song-Liao Border," in Battlefronts Real and Imagined: War, Border, and Identity in the Chinese Middle Period, edited by Don J. Wyatt, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 59–74.

[7] SHY:FY 1/32a; XCB 58.1291; SS 324.10480.

[8] The Dowager Empress Chengtian dominated Sehngzong's court until her death in 1009. "-there was no question who was ultimately in control; …the new emperor [Shengzong] was thoroughly dominated by his mother who continued to browbeat and sometimes strike him in public even when he was a grown man." She also had her own *ordo* of ten thousand cavalry. Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," in The Cambridge History of China, vol. 6, Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 90–1.

[9] The Chanyuan Covenant did not provide for the resumption of trade. Trade was, however, sanctioned shortly afterward. Jing-shen Tao, Two Sons of Heaven, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988, pp. 16–17.

[10] This summary account of Liao history follows Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, pp. 100–10.

[11] Yelü Xiezhen, the Northern Commissioner for Military Affairs, died the following year in 999, after the Liao emperor began mobilizing for the campaign against the Song.

[12] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 250–5.

[13] XCB 45.955.

[14] XCB 45.964.

[15] XCB 45.967; LS 14.154–5.

[16] XCB 45.970–1; SS 6.110; SHY:B 7/10b-11a.

[17] XCB 45.972.

[18] XCB 29.659–60.

[19] XCB 45.972.

[20] XCB 45.975.

[21] XCB 46.985.

[22] XCB 46.987.

[23] XCB 46.994.

[24] XCB 47.1009–10.

[25] LS 14.156.

[26] XCB 49.1078.

[27] XCB 49.1079.

[28] XCB 50.1082

[29] LS 14.157.

[30] XCB 50.1102; 51.1111; 51.1117; 51.1125.

[31] XCB 50.1103.

[32] XCB 51.1112.

[33] XCB 54.1190.

[34] XCB 54.1190; LS 14.158.

[35] XCB 54.1191–3.

[36] XCB 56.1228; SS 7.123. The precise date of Li Jiqian's death is unclear. He was mortally wounded in battle and died after retreating to Sanshijing (Thirty Wells) on the border of Ling prefecture about 20 January.

[37] Peter Lorge, "War and the Creation," pp. 259–67; Chen Feng, Songdai Junzheng Yanjiu, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2010, pp. 302–6.

[38] XCB 57.1251–2.

[39] XCB 57.1253.

[40] LS 14.159–60.

[41] XCB 57.1256–7.

[42] LS 14.160.

[43] XCB 57.1262

[44] XCB 57.1265; LS 14.160.

[45] XCB 57.1267.

[46] XCB 57.1268.

[47] XCB 57.1270; XCB 58.1274.

[48] XCB 58.1279.

[49] XCB 58.1280.

[50] XCB 58.1280.

[51] LS 14.160.

[52] XCB 58.1283.

[53] XCB 58.1284–5.

[54] XCB 58.1285.

[55] Xiao Talin's name is inconsistently rendered in the Chinese sources (e.g., Xiao Dalin, etc.). For convenience, I have used only this version, though my particular choice is arbitrary.

[56] XCB 58.1286–7.

[57] XCB 58.1287.

[58] XCB 58.1288.

[59] XCB 58.1290.

[60] Denis Twitchett and Kalus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, p. 109.

[61] Denis Twitchett and Kalus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," **ibid.**, 110.

[62] Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, p.16.

[63] Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 87. Russel Weigley argued that: "War in the age of battles was not an effective extension of policy by other means…but the bankruptcy of policy." The Age of Battles, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 543.

[64] On the problem of decisiveness, see Jeremy Black, European Warfare 1660–1815, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 67–86.

[65] Zhenzong was apparently willing to give up ten times what Cao Liyong agreed to. Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, p. 15.

[66] While the provisions of the Chanyuan Covenant make it clear that the annual payments were not to be treated as tribute, the Liao court always described them as tribute to all of the other states that it had relations with except, of course, the Song.

[67] Karl August Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, History of Chinese Society: Liao 907–1125, Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1949, p. 19.

[68] The Liao also fought a large and indecisive war with Koryo from 1101–1119.

[69] For the increase in annual payments, see David Wright, *From War to Diplomatic*

Parity in Eleventh-Century, China, Leiden: Brill, 2005, pp. 198–228.

[70] Christian Schwarz-Schilling's paper was revised and made available in pdf under the title: "The Treaty of Shanyuan-Then and Now: Reflections a 1000 Years Later."

[71] Hoyt Tillman, "The Treaty of Shanyuan from the Perspectives of Western Scholars," Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies 5.2 (2005), 135–55.

[72] David Curtis Wright, From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Kitan Liao, Leiden: Brill, 2005.

[73] Peter Lorge, War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795, London: Routledge, 2005.

[74] David Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity*, p. 95.

[75] Suzanne E. Cahill, "Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair of 1008," *Bulletin of Sung and Yuan Studies*, 1980, pp. 23–44.

11

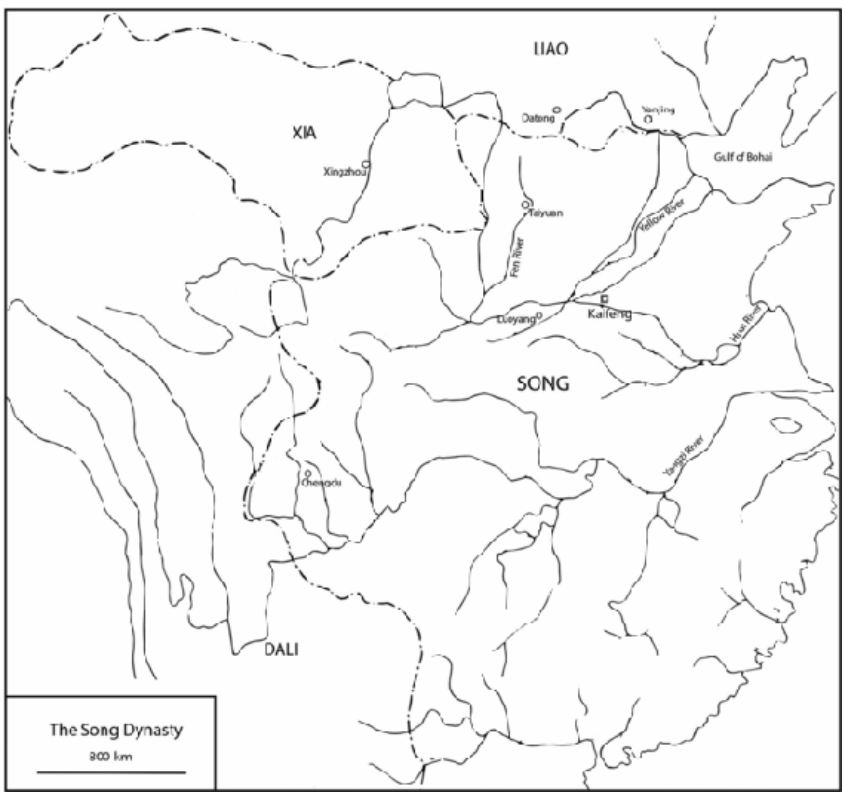
Conclusion

The political and military process that created the Song dynasty was an uncertain and chaotic series of events whose outcome was unknown to its participants. Most if not all of the decisions those historical actors made were guided by the immediate circumstances they faced, rather than larger ideological goals like emphasizing civil culture. Things did not always turn out as planned; the results of important decisions could just as easily go beyond success or failure to completely unimagined outcomes. Only so much control and order could be imposed upon even the most carefully planned political and military campaigns. The eventual stability and success of the Song founding in 1005 was never inevitable or obvious.

Even on the broader level, conditions changed over the course of the conquest. The cumulative successes of the political and military processes altered the milieu. Four different men were emperor from 954 to 1005, and none of them faced exactly the same situation that the others had. Even within the reign of a single emperor, the circumstances were constantly changing. Yet later statesmen and historians imagined the Song founding as *a* process with *a* plan that led to the particular culture of the Song dynasty. For them, the process was inevitable and its meaning was clear. The emperors and statesmen played their particular roles, which seemed obvious retrospectively.

As this account of the Song founding has shown, however, those emperors and statesmen did not always exactly fulfill their imagined roles. Song Taizu was not a great civilizer, for example, and it was Taizong who really emphasized the use of the civil service exams. These facts were always known, of course, but they have often been

swept under the rug in the interests of maintaining a later interpretation of events. The main preoccupation of the early Song court was gaining power. Even within the inherited institutional structures of the early Song, there was a considerable amount of fluidity. It was only later, when these individual precedents were seen, or at least characterized, as programmatic policy decisions, and had become established principle, that the beginning of the dynasty looked like a carefully planned operation.



32. The Song dynasty in 1005

The four emperors discussed in this book demonstrated four very different examples of the relationship between war and politics. Zhou Shizong was almost exclusively a military man, Song Taizu was a strong military man who began to use political power effectively, Song Taizong was a military and political failure, and Zhenzong resolved the final military problem of the Song founding from a position of

political security. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is Taizu who stands head and shoulders above all the rest. He was not perfect, and he did not always win, but he clearly had the abilities and luck to come out on top and build a lasting institution from a chaotic and dangerous milieu. Zhou Shizong solved his political problems with war, and Zhenzong just needed to solve his military problems, leaving Taizong much the most intriguing ruler. Taizong succeeded in getting and keeping the throne, while making serious military and political blunders. The fact that the dynasty was stable despite Taizong's mistakes is surely a testament to both his older brother and to the officials who made the government work.

While the personal characters of the respective emperors were important, it is also important to reconsider the process of forming a stable government. This relates directly to the idea that the Song founding was a process of civilizing a previously militarized and chaotic place. It is too simple to conclude that half a century of warfare was hiding an underlying ascent of civil culture, and that it was the rise of that civil culture that brought the warfare to an end. From a military point of view, the wars of conquest ended after all the Chinese kingdoms were destroyed and acknowledged stalemate or military equilibrium was reached with the Kitan Liao. The wars ended because the Song won in China and had a draw with the steppe. Civil culture had nothing to do with it.

From a political standpoint, the reason that the Song army could focus its efforts on conquest was because the internal struggle for power had been politically resolved. Military gains strengthened, rather than weakened the dynasty because the stakeholders within the dynasty concluded that their interests were better served through the dynasty's continued existence. There were winners and losers in the struggle for power, but most found losing within the Song system better than trying to overthrow it. As the empire expanded, not only were there opportunities for military men to advance themselves, there were also opportunities for civil officials to advance. When the

wars ended, the civil officials were in charge of civil affairs, and the military men went back to their barracks. That they did so was a political triumph. But it is hard to tie that mainly to the rise of civil culture.

Changing nature and use of war

The use of war changed from 954 to 1005. Unlike in the eleventh century, war was a central preoccupation of the Zhou and Song governments. The fate of the dynasty did, in fact, rest on the outcome of the major campaigns. Politics within the court was initially quite secondary to military operations. It grew in importance as the Song became more established. In Taizong's reign, politics overtook war in importance, particularly after Taizong's military efforts failed. Taizong needed to distance himself personally from warfare if he was not to be tainted by his poor record.

Yet one of the things historians overlook is that there are very, very few great strategists in history. The reason military events can later be seen to be inevitable is because we fail to appreciate how much skill was involved in achieving success. The contrast between how lauded great Western conquerors like Alexander the Great or Napoleon are and how ephemeral their achievements were is startling. We see how tactical or operational excellence can build an empire without creating anything lasting. Song Taizu, with the critical advice of Zhao Pu, commanded a group of great generals and led them to success. Taizong commanded some of the same generals early in his reign, where they won some tactical successes, but failed overall. Zhenzong had fewer great generals and very little good strategic advice.

This is not so much a case of "great man history" in which every success is imputed to the singular efforts of one person, as a recognition of the critical importance of strategic competence in addition to political, tactical, and operational competence. Song Taizu did not overthrow the Zhou dynasty or create the Song empire by himself. He was part of a group of highly competent generals who commanded efficient and effective armies. Taizu could not have done it himself, and he knew that. He had to manage the personal relations

amongst his comrades to keep their support, prevent infighting, and wean them from power. Most of the court officials were powerless and unimportant in the early Song dynasty. What mattered most was military power and the men who controlled that. Taizu's key skill was maintaining his relationships with the top generals.

Taizu was confronted with many serious questions of balancing military power versus centralized control over the military. His decision to emphasize control in 965 led to a mutiny in Sichuan. This might have been unavoidable, or simply an example of an effort that was mishandled. In either case, the results were costly, not only in civilian and military lives, but also politically and militarily. Scapegoating senior, effective generals was extremely risky because it threatened all of the other generals too. Our records lack any mention of what must surely have been a campaign of extensive private reassurances to all of the senior generals that the punishment of Wang Quanbin and his colleagues was a limited and narrowly focused matter. Of course, neither Wang nor his fellow disgraced generals suffered more than demotion, loss of field command, and "exile" to comfortable posts.

The early Song army was extremely effective on the battlefield, not only crushing the armies of every other Chinese kingdom, but also defeating major Liao forces on numerous occasions. At worst, the Song army was equal to the Liao army; it may have actually been better on the battlefield. Later Song insecurity about the effectiveness of its army should not color our perspective on the force that conquered China under Taizu and his generals.

The Song army was still powerful when it conquered the Northern Han under Taizong. It was Taizong's ill-considered decision to invade the Sixteen Prefectures without first resting and refitting the army that proved so devastating. His clear political motivations for invading overrode his military judgment. Arguably, his military judgment, based upon his very limited military experience, was poor. He also did not have or accept the advice of good military advisors. Taizu had

Zhao Pu; Taizong had no one. Strategic decision making is very hard even for highly experienced, skilled, and talented people. The whole of Taizu and Zhao Pu's strategic judgment was greater than the sum of its considerable parts. This mattered, and Taizong's failings were a sign of the immediate loss of that collective judgment.

The war that Taizong started with the Liao lasted twenty-five years. It sometimes seems as if we forget how long that period of conflict was when we glance at the Song founding. Diplomacy did not work, if for no other reason than Taizong's internal political position with respect to war. Having failed militarily, he could not make concessions without appearing weak. He had to act as if he were preparing to attack the Liao, and only allowed the hydraulic defense network in Hebei to be built unofficially. Yet it does not appear that the Song army declined significantly in its battlefield performance, particularly fighting on the defensive. Fighting defensively was tactically effective, but politically unpalatable.

Taizong functionally had no military strategy at all. The only positive goal he could pursue was to defeat the Liao and capture the Sixteen Prefectures. His only strategy was to launch a second invasion in 986, hoping that a better operational plan would succeed. When that invasion failed, he blamed it on the execution of his plan, not the plan itself or his strategy. Zhao Pu made it clear that it was precisely the strategy that was faulty. Taizong was not a good strategist and, consequently, his military adventures failed. Strategic judgment mattered greatly in the successful pursuit of goals.

Zhenzong had little at stake politically with respect to the Liao war, knew he had no military experience, and was therefore more open to advice on how to resolve the conflict. As a direct result of this, Zhenzong pursued a reasonable goal through a reasonable strategy. He sought to end the war by strengthening Song defenses. The Liao sought to end the war by forcing the Song to the bargaining table through invasions. It seems unlikely that Zhenzong imagined ending the conflict through negotiations, however, as there was very little

history of large-scale warfare in China being resolved through peace talks. He may well have simply assumed that a strong defense would render Liao military action so ineffective as to either end it or vastly diminish it. Indeed, it appears that this was precisely what the Liao court feared. If Song defenses became so strong that they lost the ability to pressure the Song court through invasions and raids, then the initiative would shift to the Song.

The Song court thus imagined a purely military solution to the problem of Liao hostility, and the Liao wanted to force a political solution. Since the Liao court knew it could not destroy the Song, its only bargaining chip was cessation of offensive military action. Had Zhenzong been willing to hold out for a few more years, he might have put the Liao in a much weaker position. The Song hydraulic defense line in Hebei was increasing in effectiveness up through 1005 even though it was not yet complete. In strictly military terms, the Song was winning the struggle with the Liao.

Zhenzong and his officials did not believe that the Song could capture the Sixteen Prefectures. At the same time, the emperor did not need a great military success to legitimize his rule, so he did not pursue one. War to Zhenzong was only war. His officials advised him either to defend against the Liao or to flee. Fleeing might have diminished him politically, it was certainly inadvisable militarily, and Zhenzong was right to go, however reluctantly, to the front. Again, it is important for us to recognize that he made the right strategic decision from among the options presented to him. The strategic decisions emperors made mattered, and profoundly affected the development of their dynasties.

Separating politics and war

In many respects, the establishment of a stable dynasty requires a separation between military and political power. This is not so much a requirement that rulers and officials must themselves wield one or the other kind of power, but that violence within the government is inherently destabilizing. When military power in the form of directed violence is the main or usual tool of influence for military men within a polity, struggles for power become not only wasteful but also diminish the military resources available to that polity for external military efforts. If military men gain political influence within a polity as a result of their external military efforts, then internal struggles for influence are less wasteful of military resources. Of course, when military efforts end because of peace, military men consequently lose political power.

There are, of course, many different kinds of political power. Of the four emperors discussed in this book, only the last one, Zhenzong, really wielded political power solely by virtue of being emperor. The preceding three were all reliant on ties of personal loyalty to their closest officials and generals. Shizong's power was based upon the loyal generals who supported him. When he died, those generals put up one of their own as emperor. Song Taizu first dealt with his own personal ties to his comrades by making marriage connections with them, and then fostered personal ties with the lower-ranking generals who rose to take his comrades' places. The latter group was mostly treated as valued individuals by the emperor through ceremonial and personal acts that emphasized his concern for them. The emperor gave them gifts of armor and weapons before a campaign so that they held and wore signs of their direct connection to him while in the field.

Song Taizong developed a group of loyal retainers before he became emperor and then ruled through them after he took the throne. His efforts to create a larger network of personally loyal

officials through the exam system failed, however, and he was still dependent upon his original retainers at the end of his reign. Taizong tried to legitimize his rule and gain the support of the army through military success; his failures left him politically isolated instead. What was critically important was that Taizong's failure to attach the army and the bureaucracy's personal loyalty to him did not destabilize the Song dynasty. There was no move to overthrow the dynasty, only Taizong. Because of this, he could firm up his position by eliminating the most plausible imperial Zhao family alternatives to his rule, his two nephews and his younger brother. Men were loyal to the Song, and had a stake in its continued rule, but Taizong was simply the Song emperor, not an individual anyone beyond his retainers had much loyalty to.

Taizong's political weakness was the reason that he was even more reticent than most emperors in naming a successor. Most emperors in Chinese history were leery of creating an alternative focus for loyalty by appointing a successor, but for Taizong it must have been especially galling to consider. At a minimum, it created an alternative to his rule, something he had gone to great lengths to prevent. Having failed to attract personal loyalty, a named successor might accomplish what he failed to do. In the event, the son he wanted to appoint went mad because of Taizong's treatment of Taizong's younger brother, Tingmei. He settled on the future Zhenzong, and was then angered by the spontaneous outpouring of support when it was announced. Taizong then went to great lengths to beat down any personal initiative Zhenzong may have had, and made him act and feel equal to the high officials.

For Zhenzong, politics and war were no longer linked. His father had broken that connection before he succeeded him. Zhenzong also did not fear being overthrown as his father had, and had no question of legitimacy hanging over him. His was the first regular succession in the Song dynasty, a fact that dramatically enhanced his legitimacy and the stability of the dynasty. Zhenzong had some personal retainers,

but he did not need the personal loyalty of his officials to control them or rule the empire. He was the Song emperor for better or worse, and political and military power flowed from him.

War, politics, and the final act of the founding

Emperors were individuals with specific personalities and circumstances. It is challenging therefore to generalize broadly about decision making during the Song founding because we are only talking about four emperors and a small number of officials who took part in the deliberations. Those four emperors from 954 to 1005 not only tried to win wars in order to defeat military rivals, win territory and defend against threats, but also to establish their own political power, and to control the political ambitions of the many ambitious men within their governments. Political strength and weakness also influenced when, how, why, and who waged military campaigns, and how the results of those campaigns were construed. Individual officials made similar political calculations, balancing their own political goals against what they perceived to be imperial intentions and good strategic choices. It was as important to gain imperial favor as to propose a correct strategy.

At the center of this study of the Song founding has not just been the individual players in that political and military drama, but also the critical importance of change. The cast of individuals and their circumstances changed very quickly from 954 to 1005. One of the most profound changes in this period was in the relationship between war and politics in shaping the Song dynasty. Both war and politics were extremely volatile forums whose interaction added further volatility to the early dynasty. Both gradually became more stable, as did their interactions. In war, stability came from the gradual conquest of the various Chinese polities, mostly under Taizu, that limited conflict to resolving the border with the Liao. In politics, stability grew out of a growing body of imperial precedent, a regularizing bureaucracy, a consistent institutional practice, and, finally, in Zhenzong, an imperial succession untainted by violence or the possibility of impropriety.[1]

The contrast between Taizu's handling of military affairs and Taizong and Zhenzong's is telling. Taizu, as far as we can tell, decided the strategic questions of the conquest with the advice of Zhao Pu. He does not appear to have consulted his generals on anything beyond operational issues. Zhao Pu was not a military man, though he clearly understood war at a profound intellectual level, and much of his advice was political. Taizong needed military endorsement to launch his campaign against the Northern Han, but then was very reluctant to allow generals outside of his retainers, who knew what he wanted said, to advise him in court. Zhenzong responded directly to General Gao Qiong's admonition before going to Chanyuan. Taizu needed some political and military advice, but he was quite able in both areas. Taizong and Zhenzong were wholly political figures, though Taizong tried not to admit this, who needed military advice. When the war ended, Zhenzong no longer needed that advice.

Once the conflict with the Liao was resolved in 1005 through a political negotiation brought to fruition by a massive military confrontation, there was no longer a place for generals in day to day affairs. There would be no major military operations for another three decades. Yet the political aspect of the founding apparently required a final act, the Feng and Shan sacrifices in 1008. As with the war, it was Zhenzong who carried out the final political act of the Song founding.

Had Taizu lived longer, perhaps the Song founding might have been completed sooner. Had Taizong not failed militarily and politically perhaps the Song founding would have been completed sooner. Taizong wanted to defeat the Liao, militarily legitimizing his own rule, and perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices, ritually showing his indisputable success. He did not because he failed. Zhenzong performed the sacrifices because he succeeded. It was the final act separating war from politics, and it established the foundation for Song imperial culture.

[1] By "imperial precedent" I mean the concrete regular practices of ordinary governing rather than the formal manufactured "Ancestral Rules (*zuzong zhi fa*)" discussed by Deng Xiaonan.

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